ABSTRACT

CLAIMING SPACES, CLAIMING THE PAST: TOURISM AND PUBLIC HISTORY IN XI’AN, CHINA SINCE THE 1990s

by Lucas J. Stanek

This thesis is an examination of the development of public history in the Chinese city of Xi’an since the 1990s in conjunction with the development of Xi’an’s regional tourism industry. The importance of tourism to the production of public historical space has led to a diverse array of acts of reconstruction, museum representation, and narrative production influenced by the desire to build Shaanxi Province’s tourism industry. First, this thesis examines the act of reconstruction at historical sites and the role of tourism in the variety of acts of historical site conservation. Then, it examines three archaeological site museums and the way in which an increasingly regionalized and privatized China allows multiple narratives of premodern history to coexist within a single city. Finally, this thesis considers the role of the tour guide and the nature of the tour guiding profession in the production of public historical narratives given the importance of the tour guide as a conduit through which knowledge is transmitted to the tourist. This research suggests that public history serves in part as a tool for developing regional tourism, and that knowing the processes by which public history is made available to visitors can help both professionals and the public alike better understand Xi’an’s past within its larger Chinese context.
CLAIMING SPACES, CLAIMING THE PAST: TOURISM AND PUBLIC HISTORY IN XI’AN, CHINA SINCE THE 1990s

Thesis

Submitted to the
Faculty of Miami University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master’s in History

By
Lucas J. Stanek
Miami University
Oxford, Ohio
2017

Advisor: Dr. Pan Yihong
Reader: Dr. Steven Conn
Reader: Dr. Stanley Toops

©2017 Lucas James Stanek
This thesis titled
CLAIMING SPACES, CLAIMING THE PAST: TOURISM AND PUBLIC HISTORY IN XI’AN, CHINA SINCE THE 1990s

by

Lucas J. Stanek

Has been approved for publication by

The College of Arts and Sciences

and

The Department of History

__________________________________________________
Pan Yihong

__________________________________________________
Steven Conn

__________________________________________________
Stanley Toops
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements v

Notes on Translation and Transliteration vi

Introduction 1

Chapter 1 - To Preserve or Restore: The Construction of Public Historical Space in Xi’an 12

Chapter 2 - Lost and Found: Representing the Past at Archaeological Sites in Shaanxi 37

Chapter 3 - Going Off Script: Tour Guides and the Production of Public Historical Narratives 56

Concluding Remarks 76

Appendix I: Photographs and Visual Materials 80

Appendix II: Interviews and Site Visits 86

Bibliography 90
Dedication

To my cohort: Zach, Leigh, Jake, Gisel, Dan, Courtney, and Adam.
Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without everyone listed below and more.

Thank you, Pan Yihong, for guiding me toward tourism, for always making sure my content is fair and accurate in a field which I have only recently entered, and for being so open to advising me on this type of project in the first place. Thank you, Stanley Toops for directing me to resources in Chinese tourism and being the first to suggest I go to Xi’an. Thank you, Steve Conn for helping me make sense of museums and always pushing me to ask better questions of my material. Thank you, Angela Brintlinger for giving me a base in Xi’an with your friend Li Yi. Thank you, Li Yi, for serving as my most valuable unofficial guide to Xi’an—and for serving dinner while I was there.

Thank you to my entire cohort at Miami University for all of the time you have spent with me on drafts, ideas, and everything in between—Gisel, I think you have read this as many times as I have by this point, if not more. Thank you to everyone in our Museums colloquium for giving me a proper foundation for my argument. Thank you to the Department of History for believing in this project and providing way too much travel and conference funding for an MA.

And finally, thank you to all of my contacts in Xi’an who were willing to sit with me for interviews, show me around the city, take photographs for me when my camera died, and make calls and emails on my behalf to try and get more information. Without your knowledge, patience, and guidance, I would not have completed this project.
Notes on Translation and Transliteration

The source base for this thesis includes museum signs, personal interviews, photographs, legal documents, guidebooks, and statistical data. As such, it has meant relying on both English and Chinese materials, depending on circumstances. In my footnotes, wherever a museum sign or document was made available in both Chinese and English, I have listed the Chinese title and English title as given by the museum itself, separated by a forward slash. In cases where signs are listed only in Chinese, I have translated the title to English in brackets. In almost all cases, the English text at museums in Xi’an is a direct translation from the Chinese; I have noted wherever this was not the case. All interviews were conducted primarily in English, with one lengthy exception, for which I received much appreciated translation assistance from my advisor Dr. Pan Yihong.

For Romanization of Chinese terminology, I use Hanyu Pinyin in italics followed by simplified characters in parentheses, except for proper nouns with otherwise agreed-upon English transliterations (e.g. Shaanxi, Chiang Kai-shek, etc.).
Introduction

The Entire World, Only a Day Away

The next eighty pages can exist only because of the first great 20\textsuperscript{th} century invention: the airplane. The airplane—and more specifically the commercial jetliner—has transformed the way we encounter our reality around us. The exotic, foreign, and mystical—once reserved only for the adventurous, the daring, and the faithful—can now be seen, heard, touched, smelled, and tasted firsthand for the cost of a plane ticket (additional fees may apply). The airplane may not have revolutionized the movement of goods—90\% of international trade is still conducted more or less in the old-fashioned way: by sea—but the jet engine has absolutely revolutionized the movement of people.\footnote{“Shipping Facts,” International Chamber of Shipping, accessed May 3, 2017. http://www.ics-shipping.org/shipping-facts/shipping-facts} Within the span of a single day, a traveler can leave New York City in the morning and arrive in Beijing sixteen hours later. The longest commercial flight in the world is just shy of eighteen hours, placing only time, money, and a visa in the way between most human beings and the rest of the world around them.

Because of relatively inexpensive and incredibly quick air travel, all the world is now a museum to the global tourist. Countries around the world have clearly taken note, too. Every nation’s past and culture is now on display in a variety of forms, exposed to the gaze of the tourist, who can visit, transgress, and return home by the end of the week. The implications of this global tourism on public history are profound, both inside the museum and out. If we run with the prevailing Foucauldian argument concerning the origin of the public museum, American elites and European royalty built their grandest museums for their own citizenry: to indoctrinate, to civilize, to enshrine, and to acculturate a nation’s people. But what does it mean that today the Louvre, the world’s most popular museum—ostensibly intended to make the French better at being French—welcomes 75\% of their visitors from abroad?\footnote{“The Louvre Welcomes 8.6 Million Visitors in 2015,” Louvre press release, January 28, 2016. http://presse.louvre.fr/86-millions-de-visiteurs-aumusee-du-louvre-en-2015_5037_5037/} Do they hope to make their 940,000 annual American visitors and 820,000 annual Chinese visitors better French citizens too?

I cannot imagine that this is the case, but certainly the legitimacy of the nation-state is still on the line, albeit in a new way. Whereas once political legitimacy for the nation-state was largely an internal affair, in our increasingly global world, filled with international organizations that identify and define the nation-state, legitimacy often comes just as much from without as...
from within. Alongside international political organizations, global tourism legitimizes a nation-state in its own fashion. All which is on display to the foreigner contributes to political legitimacy from without: every museum gallery, every historical site, every building, every road, every pothole, every train on time or late, every failed Wi-Fi connection or location without cell service is laid bare to the visitor, much to the chagrin of the host. The modern citizen may be under the watchful eye of the state, but the modern nation-state is now under the watchful eye of the tourist, who enters their homeland and notices those details to which the citizen has become accustomed. The tourist thus functions as a surveyor of a place that is not their own and takes home with them the experiences of their trip, a long-term memory of another place and another people, shaping outside perception of that place and that people every time a travel experience is recalled or recounted.

Yet the tourist has more than just eyes and memories. The typical tourist’s most essential asset is the wallet, which makes travel possible in the first place, which generates revenue, which drives economies, and which even further affirms legitimacy. Many citizens disdain the tourist, who attracts the opportunistiestic salesman hocking tacky kitsch souvenirs, who stampedes the locally famous, and who clogs public transit during travel seasons, but in many places, the tourist is welcomed with open arms, as entire local and regional economies hinge upon tourism revenue. To the tourist, every extra day stayed is another sight to see and another adventure to experience, to photograph, and to remember. To many locals in the workforce, on the other hand, every extra day stayed is another table served, another tour led, another bed made, and another tip earned. Whereas the Western world’s service economies were built largely on the backs of a burgeoning leisure class from within, the service economies of nations in the middle of industrialization can now develop further by relying on a foreign leisure class from without, thanks to commercial air travel. The international tourist is spending in one market money earned in another, generating economic development across international borders in places almost always just a day away.

In this context, public history across the globe has become an incredibly lucrative business opportunity. In China in particular, international tourists were some of the first major contributors to the service economy boom, bringing their large disposable incomes to a post-Mao China that began privatizing its tourism industry and expanding its service economy to cater to Western-style economic development. Even before Deng Xiaoping, historical sites and
museums were established in China in part to function as destinations for visiting diplomats and to demonstrate to the world the young People’s Republic’s successes in administration and development. After 1978, however, historical sites and museums began to proliferate first across coastal China and then across the rest of the mainland, welcoming private tourists—and their disposable incomes—from abroad. While tourism suffered a massive decline in the years after June 4th, 1989, it returned to full swing by the mid 1990s, driven in part by a resurgence of international tourism, but also included a new and dramatic increase in domestic tourism driven by China’s emerging middle class.

Unlike the Western world, modern Chinese public historical sites have only ever known a dual audience: foreign visitors and domestic visitors. In the early days of the Louvre, the British Museum, and the Smithsonian, only occasionally did foreigners pass through, often on a grand tour or visiting for Worlds’ Fairs. Only with the rise of mass global tourism did foreign visitors to these institutions make a dent in overall attendance. However, most major Chinese museums and historical sites were conceived and produced during their post-Mao age of tourism, and since their inception, they have been attended by large numbers of foreign and domestic guests alike. This has led Chinese tourism and public history to become intertwined with one another, as historical sites and museums continue to be established for both the recent purpose of tourism development and for older purposes of statecraft and legitimacy.

**Historiographical Context**

The dual audiences of Chinese public history force us to view Chinese museums and historical sites in a revised framework: they have a different history than Western museums as we know them. Tony Bennett’s museum is an instrument of power for generating a self-regulating citizenry, and while reinforcing nationalism is certainly something already-inclined visitors to the museum will experience, the conflicting aims of the visitor and the museum in such a framework may often lead to friction rather than indoctrination.3 As briefly discussed already, millions of visitors to Bennett’s most prominent citizen-producing centers are internationals, and thus their citizenship and nationality are not at stake. Instead, within this Foucauldian framework, the museum is a center to promote national images both internally and

---

externally, to the citizen and to the visitor, informing both audiences of the nation’s achievements.

Even still, this is a fairly myopic understanding of the museum as it stands in the last few decades or even century, especially in an age where public history professionals, curators, historians, art historians, and so forth are major decision makers within. Is the art historian-turned-curator really hoping to indoctrinate each visitor who passes through the door and transform them from one among the classless mob into an educated, regulated citizen? At some level, the curator probably believes a little more high culture is a good thing, but it seems far more likely, as Roger I. Simon suggests, that the museum is only secondarily and incidentally a place where citizens are regulated, and first and foremost a storehouse for a tradition, accessible to all who hope to witness and experience that tradition. To Simon, the museum remembers the past in order to provide social cohesion, and it reminds visitors of that past in order to encourage civility and justice. This image of the museum is far more apt for the late 20th and 21st centuries given the role of specially trained professionals in curating collections and managing the repositories of tradition. Yet the museum in the age of global tourism goes a step beyond this: if the Louvre was once responsible for storing French tradition for the French, it is now responsible for storing French tradition for humanity, and any other museum open to both domestic and foreign publics has the additional role of remembering on behalf of humanity and not just the nation-state itself.

For English-language Chinese museum studies, two major recent monographs serve as foundational texts: Kirk A. Denton’s Exhibiting the Past: Historical Memory and the Politics of Museums in Post-socialist China and Marzia Varutti’s Museums in China: The Politics of Representation after Mao. Both published in 2014, Denton’s Exhibiting the Past serves as an intensive case study of the National Museum in Beijing, with occasional detours elsewhere, while Varutti’s Museums in China is a more broad survey of approximately four dozen museums concentrated in Beijing and Shanghai plus about a dozen more scattered across South China. In Exhibiting the Past, Denton takes a primarily Foucauldian approach via Tony Bennett to the National Museum of China, citing the lack of democratic participation by the public in creating historical narratives and the heavy-handed top-down control of the Chinese Communist Party

---

over the institution as contributors to a firmly political narrative.⁵ Varutti, on the other hand, frames Chinese museums in a somewhat different light in *Museums in China*, suggesting that even Chinese museums are not entities containing singular narratives of nationalism used to regulate, but suggests instead that museums are “arenas where different visions, interests, concerns, and objectives co-exist, albeit not without friction.”⁶ Varutti proposes that Chinese museums be given some distance from Western museum studies discourse all together, as Chinese museums are still in what she calls an “embryonic” stage of development, much like the discourse surrounding Chinese public history itself.⁷

Varutti admits she is most interested in exploring narratives of nationalism and nationality in Chinese museums, and as such, any attempts to distance the theoretical underpinnings of her work do not separate it by great leaps and bounds from Denton’s work in terms of the portrayal of museum content. In both cases, Chinese museums are a story of historical narratives, controlled by the Party, in an ongoing transition from Marxist-Leninist teleology toward a more flexible, neoliberal narrative that reflects the concurrent transformation of China’s economy and changing politics of the Chinese Communist Party. Denton’s most valuable contribution is his suggestion that narratives in Chinese museums are transforming to reflect the neoliberal world order in which China is increasingly becoming a key player, but the primary goal of the museum to Denton is still to function as a mechanism of power: to utilize the past for political ends. Varutti, on the other hand, claims that in China, museums are used not as tools to actually exercise political authority, but instead as tools to “legitimize political authority.”⁸

This seems the more appropriate framing of Chinese museum narratives, but I suggest that such narratives are not merely serving as propaganda for Chinese citizens, as Varutti claims, but that such narratives attempt to legitimize the People’s Republic in the eyes of foreign visitors as well. What is missing in both works is the consideration of museum audience, both intended

---

⁷ Ibid.
⁸ Ibid., 89. Italics taken from source material.
and actual. Actual visitation figures are difficult to obtain without access to museum records, but identifying the intended audience requires answering one simple question: what languages are used in museum signage, spoken in audio guides, or utilized by museum interpreters? Simplified Chinese is ubiquitous, of course, but when a Chinese museum offers a second language in museum signage—and hundreds if not thousands of Chinese museums do—that language is English. The widespread availability of English-language signage in museums, at historical sites, and across China in general suggests that foreign—primarily Western—visitors are expected, welcomed, and need not learn Chinese in order to learn about China’s past.

In the age of global tourism, museums are neither simply technologies of national power nor storehouses of a tradition: they are tourist destinations, and their attendance numbers and revenue streams depend upon tourists to remain relevant. As Nelson H. Graburn and Lu Jin suggest in a forthcoming article, drawing tourists is a central component of museums in China today. To separate museum studies from studies of their intended and actual audiences is a serious oversight: while funding from various levels of government is certainly key to developing and maintaining Chinese museums, ticket prices and tour groups help keep many institutions afloat financially. Thus, beyond seminal works like that of Denton and Varutti, I have relied upon a body of tourism studies literature (as well as literature on cultural heritage and architectural conservation) in order to understand the form and function of public history beyond its narratives alone. To broaden the picture, I have relied upon tourism-related works such as Chris Ryan and Gu Huimin’s *Tourism in China: Destinations, Cultures, and Communities*, Dean MacCannell’s *The Tourist*, Anthony Miller’s “Making ‘Rapprochement’ Work,” and Xuewen Zhang’s “China International Travel Service, 1978-1989,” among others.

In addition to MacCannell’s commentary on authenticity, which is central to my first chapter, related works including chapters from Katharina Weiler and Niels Gutschow’s *Authenticity in Architectural*.

---

9 Of the thirty or so museums and historical sites I have visited in Shanghai, Beijing, and Xi’an, all had English-language signage available—even those sites and museums which receive almost exclusively Chinese visitors. Occasionally, Chinese museums offer a third written language: Japanese.


Heritage Conservation have helped me navigate how tourists perceive authenticity and what that means for the production of historical space.\textsuperscript{12}

The final major body of literature which I have used for reference is the young field of Chinese public history. While nominally the field contains only a handful of scholars and a handful of articles to date—led in valiant efforts by Na Li and a few of her colleagues—I would consider any major contribution to museum studies, cultural heritage studies, and tourism studies to additionally be a contribution to the field of Chinese public history.\textsuperscript{13} The source base of this thesis is evidence for my argument that Chinese public historical discourse needs to broaden beyond the recent training seminars and practicums held across China: these efforts are surely promising ones, but public history is much larger than heritage conservation and museum work. Rather than diverging into disparate genres of historical, cultural, and sociological study, then, I suggest we reconvene to understand the broader implications of museums, historical sites, and tourism on humanity’s encounter with itself, through what we call public history.

Claiming Space and History in Xi’an

Since the 1990s, domestic tourism in China has been on the rise in the same explosive fashion as the Chinese economy at large. As more and more Chinese have disposable incomes, they have the capacity to travel across their own country and abroad, joining the ranks of the new global leisure class of tourists. This has precipitated a dramatic rise in provincially and municipally operated museums and historical sites across China by both regional bureaus of cultural heritage devoted to a city or province’s history and by private investors hoping to make a name and contribution to their home town or home province. Now, the nationalistic focus of Chinese public history observed by the likes of Denton and Varutti in the capital and coastal trade centers is being eclipsed by regionalism: private investors and government bureaus with


\textsuperscript{13} For more on public history in China, see Na Li and Martha A Sandweiss, “Teaching Public History: A Cross-Cultural Experiment,” \textit{The Public Historian} 38, no. 3 (August 2016): 78-100. Na Li organized not only this event, but also the first National Conference on Public History in China that preceded it in 2013. She is currently completing her second monograph, \textit{An Introduction to Public History}, in Chinese.
significant political and economic power have been quietly yet forcefully carving out a place for themselves within China’s self-proclaimed 5000 year history by building museums, restoring historical sites, and bringing tourists into the doors of their institutions.

The narratives in these municipal and provincial museums still retain much of the language that Denton, Varutti, and other museum studies scholars recognize in the coastal centers of power. However, these institutions do not exist to indoctrinate citizens, they exist to make the seemingly irrelevant relevant again: to put themselves back on the map. To witness this complex process firsthand requires only a train ride out of Beijing or Shanghai to the heartland provinces and second-tier cities. There, the State Administration of Cultural Heritage grants the provincial and municipal bureaus that it oversees the rights to develop and operate museums and historical sites within their jurisdiction as they see fit, resulting in a proverbial hundred flowers of museums, historical sites, and so forth blooming in new and inventive forms.

In China’s heartland, public history is a provincial and municipal affair that takes countless different shapes depending upon the goals of different bureaus of cultural heritage and tourism, the museum administration, the investors and other contributors to the development process, and the history contained within each region itself. In the provinces, the nation’s history is being told piecemeal, and the focus of that history is often one of regional importance, rather than national importance.

Evidence for this phenomenon is found throughout one city in particular—Xi’an—and the province for which it serves as capital—Shaanxi. Xi’an—once the capital of China, but no longer—faces a unique set of circumstances: it has one of the most storied histories of any city in the world and was once the most populous city in the world, but it has fallen largely out of global and even national significance. Today, Xi’an is designated a second-tier city by the central government, in contrast to the five first-tier cities of Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Chongqing, and Guangzhou, with much less political and economic capital and clout than it once held as the Han and later Sui-Tang capital Chang’an. However, Xi’an retains the cultural capital and clout of its long history, stored in the countless historical sites from centuries past and continuous archaeological discoveries in and around the city over the 20th and 21st centuries. Neolithic settlements, grand mausoleums, global trading centers, relics of the Buddha, and buried treasure hordes dot the landscape of Shaanxi Province, storing the potential for making Xi’an one of the most desirable tourist destinations in the country. This fact is not lost on the provincial and
municipal bureaus of cultural heritage and tourism, who have been busy working to establish museums, rebuild historical sites, organize traveling exhibitions, and publicize the history and culture of Xi’an and Shaanxi Province both to China and the world. Within the established processes of nation-building that other museum studies scholars have recognized, Xi’an and similar provincial-level cities have used tourism and public history in tandem to claim a piece of China’s legendary history for their own purposes: to draw tourists, to attract investment, and to put themselves back on the map in a China that has become a coastal powerhouse in the 20th and 21st centuries. By developing public historical spaces in the form of museums, historical sites, historical theme parks, and so forth, cities like Xi’an and provinces like Shaanxi are claiming part of China’s history as their own. For Xi’an in particular, with arguably the longest and most important premodern history of any Chinese city, promoting its history is the perfect branding campaign. Ensuring that domestic tourists are reminded of Xi’an’s historical importance and that foreign tourists are made aware of it turns potential tourists into actual visitors, and actual visitors into return customers.

**Methodology and Outcomes**

I encountered this phenomenon of the local coopting the national for local purposes well after I had begun research on the ground in June of 2016. My original aim was to expand upon the work of earlier scholars to incorporate a non-coastal city into the conversation and to further understand the relationship of tourism with public history via tour groups, tour guides, and the sites and museum they visit. Thus, my research combines more traditional museum studies methods—including “reading” museums as texts—with oral histories of the development of tourism in Xi’an via current and former tour guides, museum docents, and travel agents, as well as standard historical investigations through documents concerning laws, regulations, museums, tourism, and so forth.

The historical sites and museums that I visited were a combination of places I had planned to visit prior to my trip and places that were recommended to me while I was in Xi’an by tour guides and travel agents who organize and operate tour group itineraries. My interview questions were directed primarily at understanding how the tourism industry functions in Shaanxi Province since the early 1990s and more specifically how tour guides lead tourists through historical sites and museums. Where the experience of the tourist comes into play, I
have relied primarily upon my own past experiences in Shanghai and Beijing led by CITs-employed tour guides, as well as brief tours in museums and at historical sites in Xi’an. My other sources include museum signage and museum object displays, photographs at museums and historical sites (both my own and published elsewhere), guide books from Xi’an and exhibit books from museums and historical sites, as well as all of the otherwise-intangible experiences of the dual researcher-tourist.

What follows is an occasionally disjointed but hopefully evocative triptych of investigations into the interrelated natures of historical conservation, public history, and tourism in and surrounding the city of Xi’an in various public historical spaces. In Chapter 1, I explore how the debated concept of authenticity has resulted in a tourist-driven phenomenon of historical site reconstruction, whereby provincial and local bureaus authorize and fund the restoration and reconstruction of historical spaces in order to attract visitors and promote tourism development. I argue that historical sites in China have been reconstructed rather than preserved in order to appeal to the growing market of domestic tourists, who largely favor reconstruction over preservation. In Chapter 2, I conduct a spatial and textual reading of three major archaeological sites and their on-site museums in Xi’an, revealing some of the many representational methods, historical narratives, and theoretical underpinnings in place at such spaces. I argue that while prevailing Marxist historical narratives are still in use at site museums, they take a variety of forms driven by local rather than national forces. In Chapter 3, I examine the role of the tour guide and museum docent in dismantling, understanding, and reconstructing an otherwise-straightforward, top-down public historical narrative provided via bureaus of cultural heritage and regional tourism administrations. I suggest that the highly contingent nature of tour guiding results in countless permutations of otherwise officially regulated public historical narratives.

From these three investigations, I will hopefully demonstrate that despite official national protocols concerning heritage management, national laws governing museums and displays, and national organizations devoted to regulating tourism, public history outside of Beijing is very much a local affair, in the sense that local bureaus, local administrators, local investors, and even individual tour guides have retained and even expanded their capacity to make the narratives of public history their own. Through the ever-changing whirlwind of regional politics in China, the provincial and the local—since the re-emergence of tourism in the early 1990s—have exhibited significant agency in the creation of a Chinese public history that serves provincial and local
purposes. As in other areas of governance, the Party establishes idealistic goals in legal form, but provincial and local bureaucracy implements those laws through pragmatic, creative, and often unexpected ways. The grand narrative of Chinese history is undoubtedly a nationalist one, regulated at the national level, but the actual history available to the publics who visit museums and historical sites in Xi’an speaks less of the importance of China globally and more of Xi’an’s place within China’s history, and in doing so claims much of China’s national history as its own.

Let’s begin the tour.
Chapter 1 – To Preserve or Restore: The Construction of Public Historical Space in Xi’an

Among the many contentious debates in a modernizing China is the debate over whether to preserve or restore historical sites. The debate began in the early 20th century, shortly after the fall of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) and the establishment of the Republic of China and then the People’s Republic of China shortly thereafter. The fall of the Qing Dynasty served as a logical breaking point in China’s historical narrative: both the Republic and People’s Republic recognized themselves as parties establishing a new China in this post-imperial era of Chinese history, which brought about myriad questions. One such question held—and has continued to hold—particularly profound implications in Chinese historical work: what should become of China’s imperial past in the face of modernization?

This line of questioning is essential for understanding China’s historical consciousness in the post-imperial era. It serves as the basis of my investigation here, with a focus more specifically on what has become of China’s physical-but-immobile components of the historical record: historical sites. The first portion of this chapter examines the discourse and official policies as to what should become of historical sites, and the latter portion of this chapter examines what has become of those sites in practice, and how that shapes public consumption of historical knowledge.

At the center of this debate is the ongoing conversation over preservation versus restoration. Preservation means to maintain a historical site “as is:” to freeze it in the moment in which it was “retired” from its active life, whether in a state of good repair, a state of ruin, or somewhere in between. Restoration, on the other hand, means to reproduce the look and function of a site in a particular moment of its past via partial or total reconstruction using contemporary techniques. In short, “preservation” means to intervene only for the sake of maintaining a site’s present state, whereas “restoration” means to rebuild, repaint, or recreate a site or structure to appear as it once did.

Since the founding of the People’s Republic, restoration has become an increasingly popular method of opening historical sites to public audiences. Perhaps the most well-known examples of restoration in China are the fully reconstructed segments of the Great Wall at
Badaling and Mutianyu Pass, which together welcome over ten million visitors per year.\(^4\) While much of the Great Wall is still traversable by careful hiking, it lies in relative ruin. Badaling and Mutianyu, on the other hand, take the lion’s share of visitors, in part because in 1957 they were fully reconstructed to resemble what the Wall once looked like during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).\(^5\) There are other “wild,” or relatively ruined, stretches of the Great Wall just beyond Badaling and Mutianyu, some of which are even visible at the end of the reconstructed portions, but the “wild” stretches receive only a fraction of the tourists that visit Badaling or Mutianyu and are known better as hiking destinations that attract international tourists.\(^6\) By and large, the reconstructed stretches are the hallmark of a Beijing tour, whereas the “wild” Great Wall sections are typically an excursion reserved for the curious and adventurous.

While the historical sites of Xi’an are not quite as popular as the Great Wall—only the Terracotta Army Museum comes close to rivaling the Great Wall with approximately 4.8 million visitors per year—Xi’an’s historical sites still receive millions of visitors per year.\(^7\) In terms of domestic Chinese tourists, Shaanxi Province is fairly typical across the board among non-coastal provinces in terms of out-of-province visitors.\(^8\) In terms of international tourists, however, Shaanxi Province is one of the most popular heartland provinces, and—more importantly for tourism revenue—the average length of a visitor’s stay in Shaanxi is considerably higher than in neighboring provinces.\(^9\) This is likely due to the dozens of famous historical sites in and around Xi’an that encompass a history from the early Neolithic to the Communist period, many of which are far older than those of the popular coastal cities of Beijing and Shanghai. Xi’an’s Tang Dynasty (618-907) structures and monuments predate their coastal Ming, Qing, and colonial counterparts anywhere from 600 to 1300 years, which itself is an attraction to Xi’an and further presents tough issues of historical preservation and representation. Together, the ravages of time and the stress of tourism present serious conservation concerns around Xi’an that must be


\(^{16}\) Ibid.

\(^{17}\) “World’s Most-Visited Tourist Attractions,”; According to the Terracotta Warriors Museum, the one-day attendance record for the site was set on the October 1\(^{st}\) holiday in 2012, when over 460,000 visitors purchased entry tickets.


\(^{19}\) Ibid., 62-63.
handled through a complex, decentralized, and highly local process of planning and implementation, a process which I hope to make clearer later in this chapter.

Before continuing, it is necessary to briefly consider the nature of the historical site within the larger context of its life cycle. From the moment a structure or site is brought into existence by its creators in a particular time and place, that site typically embarks on a long, changing, and contested journey of its life cycle from its original purpose through a variety of different purposes; the lucky—or perhaps unlucky—sites are eventually “retired” as historical sites. Once a site has “retired” from its earlier uses and is transformed into a historical site, it begins to accomplish ends for which it was never originally intended, including drawing tourism revenue and contributing to public historical knowledge. Just as the artifact becomes an art object when placed in the art museum and the written document becomes a historical resource when placed in the archive, the historical site transforms into a producer of historical and cultural knowledge beyond the scope of its original purpose. It becomes a conscious signifier of unconscious historical processes, put on display to millions of visitors every year. Thus, the ways in which historical sites are conserved and presented to the public directly affect a site’s capacity to generate public historical knowledge, as both conservation and restoration “freeze” a site in a particular moment in time, constricting the imagination of the visitor in the process.

I argue that the ways in which historical sites are conserved and presented to the public are directly related to both conscious and unconscious notions of historical meaning and value: historical value to the tourist and conservationist alike is centered around “authenticity.” Chinese conservationists and Chinese tourists do not agree entirely on what “authentic” means at a historical site. As I will contend, it is the tourist’s conception of authenticity—not the conservationist’s—that has thus far won the debate over how historical sites should be developed, resulting in a developer’s preference for restoration rather than preservation. This result has shaped and continues to shape public historical consciousness in China given both the potentials and limitations of restoration over preservation in generating historical knowledge.

---

21 For more on the life cycles of historical artifacts, see Susan Vogel, “Always True to the Object, in Our Fashion,” in Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display, eds. Ivan Karp & Steven Lavine, 191-204 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990). In “Always True to the Object,” Vogel explores the problems with exhibiting African cultural objects as pieces of art and the varieties of ways in which those objects can be exhibited, with varying degrees of success, to produce historical knowledge concerning their original purposes.
In the pursuit of illuminating this process of reconstructing historical sites in China, I first outline the history of Chinese heritage conservation as it emerged shortly after the end of China’s imperial era through both discourse and law. Then, I examine the implementation—or lack thereof—of such discourse, regulations, and protocols at historical sites in and around Xi’an using Qianling Mausoleum as an example. After establishing the historical context in which hundreds if not thousands of historical site restorations have taken place across China, I then examine the relationship between restoration, tourism, and public historical knowledge as well as the limitations that the historical record places upon developers hoping to restore a site, using Huaqing Hot Springs Palace as a case study. Finally, I examine the possibility of combining elements of preservation and restoration into a more transparent, evocative, and knowledge-producing historical site through the example of the Hanguang Entrance Remains Museum. This process has played out historically as a debate between professional conservationists and non-professional developers, between the State Administration of Cultural Heritage in Beijing and the provincial and local bureaus of cultural heritage, tourism, and urban planning and development throughout China. Ultimately, I hope to reveal how local forces have succeeded in developing tourism through widespread reconstruction, despite official regulations discouraging or even forbidding the practice in favor of preservation.

A Brief History of Chinese Heritage Conservation in the Post-Imperial Era

Chinese heritage conservation has a unique trajectory over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries in which Chinese theories, methods, and laws developed through a blend of both Chinese and Western precedents. This evolving discourse concerning Chinese heritage conservation through law and protocol is essential to understanding the development of historical sites and the goals of competing forces in representing China’s past at historical sites. The influence of Western conservation and public history in their Chinese counterparts is evident at every turn both in the education of China’s conservation pioneers and the drafting of protocols governing historical site conservation. As we will see later, however, culturally specific understandings of historical authenticity differed significantly between professionals and the public over this period, resulting in a profession that officially ascribes to Western models but that functions in practice as conservation “with Chinese characteristics.”
The first scholar in the post-imperial era to bring Western conservation theory to China was Liang Sicheng, a pioneer of both Chinese conservation and architectural history. Liang studied architecture and heritage conservation at the University of Pennsylvania from 1924 to 1928, where he became infatuated with Chinese architectural history upon receiving a copy of the *Yingzao Fashi*, the Song Dynasty treatise on building standards. Later in his life, he applied this theory and knowledge to historical sites by leading numerous restoration projects in China, photographing ancient structures, founding multiple schools of architecture at Chinese universities, and writing extensively on the history of Chinese architecture. Liang’s work, published in the 1930s and 1940s, serves as the foundation of Chinese architectural history, and, more importantly for this investigation, as the foundation of Chinese cultural heritage conservation.

Despite Liang’s extensive foundational work in Chinese conservation, the turmoil of the Second World War and the concurrent Chinese Civil War meant that conservation efforts were subjected to interruption and operated without any legal basis. It was not until after securing power in 1949 that the Chinese Communist Party could focus on state-building and the management of history as one aspect of their modernization efforts, well after many structures had suffered considerable damage or outright destruction. One early component of this process was funding provided to provincial and municipal governments to preserve or restore damaged historical sites, including the Great Wall restoration that took place in 1957, which subsequently served as a must-stop destination for foreign delegations and later tourists. Another aspect of the management of the past was the incorporation of cultural heritage into political discourse and law outright: the first major legal guidelines concerning cultural heritage in China were the “Provisional Regulations on the Protection and Control of Cultural Relics,” enacted by the State Council in 1961. These regulations established provisions for the protection of both relics and

---


24 Law, 中国指南, 75.
sites of cultural and historical importance, giving official national legal backing to conservation efforts.

Just five years later, however, the Cultural Revolution brought to the forefront of political consciousness the debate as to whether China’s physical past should be preserved in the name of posterity or destroyed in the name of progress. China witnessed significant destruction of those historical sites and relics ostensibly protected by the 1961 Provisional Regulations. During the Revolution, the State Council redoubled their efforts to protect China’s historical record by issuing the “State Council Opinion Concerning Protection of Cultural Relics and Books in the Cultural Revolution.”25 This opinion aimed to prevent wholesale destruction of China’s relics, books, and historical sites, but it could not be easily enforced within the context of the Revolution given the amount of power held by the Red Guards and more radical factions of the Party. Only with the end of the Cultural Revolution and the reform efforts under Deng Xiaoping did the People’s Republic develop a more comprehensive law for historical sites and relics: in 1982, the People’s Congress and Standing Committee passed the “Law of the People’s Republic of China on Protection of Cultural Relics.” This new law comprehensively replaced the earlier Provisional Regulations of 1961 and further stressed the importance of historical preservation for purposes of education, nation-building, and research, among others.26

The 1982 Law set forth national standards and purposes for public historical preservation, but at the same time granted significant power to provincial and municipal bureaus to oversee the protection and maintenance of sites of cultural heritage, and by extension the authority to develop those sites for public attendance. It originally permitted three valid reasons for developing a historical site: establishing on-site museums, forming preservation institutes, or developing sites for tourism. In effect, this created an environment where site conservation was primarily a municipal and provincial affair varying in accordance with the rural and urban planning bureaus’ own goals for local development. Only in cases where sites were considered of “historical and cultural value at the national level” by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH) were development plans required to be forwarded to the State Council for

approval, but even then, actual cases where this has transpired are slim to none, as should be clear by the end of this chapter. The result of this law and its subsequent revisions essentially allowed regional government bureaus to independently determine how a particular historical site should be maintained or developed. The language of the law was open to interpretation, and the implementation of the law was further dependent upon enforcement of the law in the first place. With no official set of conservation guidelines to accompany this law, during the 1980s and 1990s, provincial and municipal governments could maintain and develop most historical sites within their own jurisdictions as they saw best fit.

Amid the explosion of tourism in China in the 1980s and 1990s, local bureaus developed hundreds of historical sites, in several notable cases with little or no attention given to historical, cultural, or architectural accuracy of the site’s structural design, which prompted calls for new regulations from SACH. One such example is the 1996 reconstruction of the Mu’s Residence in Yunnan, the Naxi tributary ruler’s palace first constructed during the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). The Mu’s Residence was rebuilt ostensibly as an ethnic minority historical site by local authorities but done so without any architectural knowledge of the original structure and with complete neglect for Naxi culture in the design, essentially transplanting Ming-era northern Han architecture from Beijing onto a decidedly non-Ming, non-northern, non-Han historical site. As a response to the historical inaccuracy of the new Mu’s Residence and many similarly contentious restoration projects, four organizations—the Chinese branch of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (China ICOMOS), the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI), the Australian Heritage Commission (AHC), and SACH—developed an official set of guidelines to provide uniformity, transparency, and accountability for site development and to protect against historical misrepresentation. These guidelines—the Principles for the Conservation of Cultural Heritage Sites in China, or China Principles—were adopted by SACH in Beijing in 2000 and published in 2002 alongside a revision of the 1982 Law on Protection of Cultural Relics.

---

27 Ibid.
30 For more on the dramatic growth of tourism in this period, see Chapter 3.
The *China Principles* exemplify the reincorporation of Western conservation practices in Chinese conservation that began with Liang Sicheng 75 years prior and demonstrate steps taken by the national government to regulate the booming industry of historical site reconstruction. The *Principles* reflected the work of various Western architecture and conservation experts, primarily from the United States and Australia, alongside Chinese architecture and conservation experts, and now serve as a set of protocols for the maintenance and preservation of sites of cultural and historical importance. The original edition included the first specific regulations for developing and implementing conservation plans, established new guidelines for best practice, and claimed binding, central authority given their adoption by China ICOMOS and SACH. As noted in the document’s Commentary, the *China Principles* claim this authority outright: “Following approval and proclamation of the Principles by the national government department responsible for heritage [SACH], the conservation process stipulated in the Principles will be a requirement of heritage administration and management departments,” with “heritage administration and management departments” referring to the provincial and municipal bureaus themselves.

Despite the document’s self-proclaimed authority and the official adoption of the *China Principles* by China ICOMOS and SACH, actual cases where the *Principles* were implemented in the 2000s were limited to only two sites of “national importance.” At their very outset, the *China Principles* fell into a category of documents relatively new to China: they were a non-mandatory instrument with no official legal capacity for enforcement, which the draft team has acknowledged and continues to struggle with in the years after its publication and attempted implementation. In the first six years of their existence, only two heritage sites in China were developed according to *China Principles* protocols—the Chengde Mountain Resort and Mogao Grottoes, both UNESCO world heritage sites. The *China Principles* team has made clear that even at these few sites where the *Principles* were applied, the tension between professional conservation and tourist development remained. Wherever economic benefits, tourism,

---

34. Ibid., 70.
private investment were valued more highly than historical preservation, municipal and provincial bureaus have often opted to disregard protocols and pursue restoration efforts that they expected would boost tourism revenue. In the complex political processes of provincial and municipal government work, it appears the case that local bureaus of cultural heritage, whose goal is officially to protect and disseminate historical knowledge, were either overshadowed or complicit. Either the bureaus lost ground to money-driven entrepreneurial pursuits pushed forward by bureaus of construction, rural and urban development, and tourism in partnership with private industry investment, or—more troublingly—they may have been party to such discouraged restoration efforts of their own volition.\[37\]

Given the importance of tourism as a private, profit-driven industry to the development and management of historical sites, following the money is crucial. The diverse sources of finance for historical site development in China ranges from government-allocated funds to private investment, and from on-site tourism revenue to non-profit grants; this, of course, makes tracing funding difficult without access to each site’s financial records.\[38\] In the case of UNESCO World Heritage sites such as the Mu’s Residence and Lijiang Old Town, funding was provided by the national government and the World Bank.\[39\] After the controversy over the site, the Global Heritage Fund, an international non-profit organization, began funding projects to undo ahistorical fabrications and protect the existing historical structures that are under threat from further misrepresentation.\[40\] More recently, sites such as the Tang West Market Museum have been funded primarily through private investment, which has expanded the already-diverse sources of funding at historical sites into a blend of private, governmental, and international non-governmental funding.\[41\] While further investigation into the source of funding is certainly

---

38 I made repeated efforts to secure interviews with historical site administrators through multiple channels, including via contacts in the municipal museum administration in Xi’an. Unfortunately, site administrators were too hesitant to provide comment or offer even brief access to archived financial records.
41 “Introducing TWMG Leaders,” Tang West Market Group, accessed March 30, 2017. http://www.tangwestmarket.com/about/leadership-profiles/; The Tang West Market Museum is thus far a special case: the archaeological site of the Tang West Market was discovered during the preliminary construction phases of a giant shopping complex, which caused developers to redesign the shopping center. Their new plans put the Tang West Market Museum and archaeological site at the center of the shopping and entertainment complex while operating the museum themselves, for which they received government approval. This made the Tang West Market Museum the first privately owned and operated on-site museum in China. There is no entrance fee for the museum, unlike most publicly owned and operated museums in Xi’an. Instead, revenue is generated from the shopping and
warranted, my own capacity to undertake such an investigation was limited by time and contacts. For the sake of this chapter, then, I will simply suggest that money—increasingly private and non-profit money—is at the root of historical site development in China, and that the promotion of tourism is the primary driving force of that money.

Reconstructing the Past: Authenticity as a Cultural Phenomenon

In Xi’an, the conflict between regional tourism development and national historical conservation is evident at every turn. Shaanxi Province is a useful case study for these two conflicting yet intertwining processes given the number of sites that are highly popular among tourists, but not of “historical and cultural value at the national level” (i.e. UNESCO world heritage sites) and therefore not subjected to official review by the State Council. Many Shaanxi sites from the Tang Dynasty and earlier have further been subjected to dozens of earthquakes over the centuries as well. Together, time and environmental damage have necessitated acts of conservation at these sites in order to safely open them to the public. Beyond mere preservation, however, the Chinese tourist’s typical understanding of “historical authenticity” has encouraged provincial and municipal forces involved in heritage management to favor reconstruction, not the officially sanctioned preservation, as the primary method of site development.

Historical sites in Xi’an that were conserved prior to the explosion of tourism in the 1980s typically inform the visitor of acts of restoration that restored the look and structural integrity of sites, as these sites were often rebuilt using the first round of funding from the central government in the 1950s and 1960s. As noted earlier, these early conservation efforts were a component of state building through historical management, exemplified by a simultaneous boom in archaeological excavation and historical conservation across China. In 1957, the national government provided funds to municipal governments nationwide for the conservation

---

entertainment district recently constructed around the museum and archaeological site itself. For more on the Tang West Market Museum, see Chapter 2.

42 “Law on Protection of Cultural Relics.”
44 In terms of archaeology, Shaanxi Province became famous for multiple archaeological discoveries in this period, including the Banpo Neolithic site, the supposed finger relic of the Buddha at Famen Temple, and of course the Terracotta Army at the Mausoleum of Emperor Qin Shihuang. For more on archaeological representations, see Chapter 2.
of historical sites, with the Great Wall at Badaling serving as the first major project in the effort.\footnote{\textit{寺塔整修/Repairs and Restorations of the Temple and the Pagoda},” Small Wild Goose Pagoda, photographed June 7, 2016.} Shortly after the restoration of the Great Wall at Badaling, Xi’an’s Municipal People’s Government used their appropriated funding to restore two Tang Dynasty monuments of great religious and historical significance in Xi’an: the Giant Wild Goose Pagoda and the Small Wild Goose Pagoda. In 1959, the Giant Wild Goose Pagoda underwent restoration, and between 1964 and 1965, the Small Wild Goose Pagoda underwent similar restoration.\footnote{\textit{大雁塔历代修缮年表/Chronology of Repairs and Maintenances of the Pagoda,” Giant Wild Goose Pagoda, photographed June 2, 2016; “寺塔整修/Repairs and Restorations of the Temple and the Pagoda,” Small Wild Goose Pagoda, photographed June 7, 2016.}]

Both of these restoration efforts took place well before the passage and implementation of the 1982 Law on Protection of Cultural Relics as well as the 2000 SACH adoption of the \textit{China Principles}. Because the pagodas had been restored repeatedly during the imperial era, however, each act of restoration was relatively minimal and meant to undo only decades of decay rather than centuries. Conservation projects since 1982, however, have faced legal restrictions by SACH concerning both how and why a site can be developed: as previously noted, the 1982 Law allows active development only for purposes of constructing museums, establishing preservation institutes, and developing tourism. Furthermore, since 2000, the \textit{China Principles} have served as the official protocol for project development, and they favor preservation over restoration wherever possible. Yet, given the power that the 1982 Law granted to municipal and provincial governments, reconstructions continued unabated, and as we will see, to even more extreme degrees in recent years than had been undertaken before.

One such redeveloped site in Shaanxi Province is Qianling Mausoleum, the necropolis of Emperor Gaozong and Empress Wu of Tang, constructed during the Tang Dynasty in 684. Qianling can be found 90 kilometers outside of Xi’an and was originally surrounded by a sprawling funerary complex that included temples, monuments, and ceremonial walls and watchtowers.\footnote{Su Hong, ed. \textit{Xi’an: One of the Four Ancient Capitals of the World} (Xi’an: Shaanxi Tourism Press, 2002), 42.} The site has come under repeated efforts by members of the Shaanxi Provincial government for full excavation and development: the tomb of Gaozong and Wu is the only known Tang Dynasty tomb never to be breached by grave robbers or opened by archaeologists, and archaeologists believe it to house treasures rivaling the emperor Qin Shihuang’s Terracotta Army 100 kilometers to the east. Thus far, efforts to open the tomb have been met with
pushback at every occasion by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage, but the provincial government, knowing firsthand from the Terracotta Army the prestige and tourism revenue that likely lie slumbering beneath the mountain, continues to petition for excavation rights.  

While the debate between national interests and provincial desires unfolded, some of the above-ground structures were restored and made available to tourists. After centuries of decay, only the stone structures of the Qianling complex remained standing: four watchtowers, dozens of statues, and a variety of steles. The stone watchtowers in particular are a valuable case for examination due to their unique place among notable Shaanxi sites. Unlike many Tang-era historical sites in Xi’an, the watchtowers were not maintained or rebuilt at any point between their original construction and their recent reconstruction—likely due to their location far outside of the city and their nature as necropolis monuments. As such, they suffered considerable structural damage from repeated earthquakes and general neglect.

Sometime after 2000, however, the remnants of the watchtowers were fully restored and became a centerpiece of a growing tomb-tourism hotspot just outside of Xi’an. Photographs of the site, two published in 2002 and two taken in 2016, show the striking disparity before and after restoration. In the first set of photographs, the stone watchtowers are merely ruined mounds, overgrown with trees on the rear face. In 2016, however, the towers were in pristine condition, completely rebuilt of new, gray stone, with hardly a blemish in sight, lined by freshly groomed topiary shrubs. This reconstruction, like many reconstructions that took place in the post-Mao era, is notable for an absence: while early and only partially restored sites such as the Giant and Small Wild Goose Pagodas have a complete timetable of all major restorations available at their site museums, there is no on-site signage or documentation of the reconstruction at Qianling.

The towers were rebuilt only after 2002, which begs the question: given the restrictions on reconstruction both in law and in official guidelines, why were they reconstructed at all? The reconstruction stands in firm opposition to the China Principles, as well as certain open-ended components of the 1982 Law, but it technically adheres to the 1982 Law insofar as conservation

49 See Appendix I, Figures 1–4. A close examination of Figure 3 shows the reconstruction process underway: in the far distance is one of the two anterior watch towers that flank the entrance of the causeway, fully restored. The gatehouse watchtowers, pictured in all four figures, were reconstructed shortly thereafter.
50 “Chronology of Repairs,” “Repairs and Restorations.”
planning is left up to the will of municipal and provincial governments. The answer why is hiding in plain sight. Beyond the obvious reconstruction of the towers between 2002 and 2016 as evident in the photos, there is a new addition in the 2016 photographs that is virtually absent in 2002: tourists.

To understand why tourists now flock to certain sites in Shaanxi Province over others, it is essential that we understand the tourists’ conception of historical authenticity. “Authenticity” was first invoked in relation to historical sites in 1923 by John Marshall in his *Conservation Manual* and has subsequently blossomed into an entire subfield of discourse in heritage conservation. In practical terms, “authenticity” has two main cultural meanings in China, one derived from Western heritage conservation and one derived from Liang Sicheng himself. The Western-derived meaning, taken from the *Conservation Manual* and its related discourse, asserts that authenticity exists within the original components of a historical site and “that our first duty is not to renew [historical sites] but to preserve them.” This idea is encapsulated both in the 1982 Law and in the *China Principles*, and it can be roughly categorized as the professional conservationists’ view of authenticity, a definition to which both Chinese and Western heritage conservationists ascribe. Professional conservationists lean toward preservation, not restoration.

Liang Sicheng’s definition, on the other hand—which is primarily concerned with *xiujiu ruiju* (修旧如旧) or “restoring the old as it was”—is an alternate view of authenticity, where the form, and not the components, is most central to historical authenticity. According to Liang Sicheng, *xiujiu ruiju* means that “we should do our best to keep or restore the forms when these buildings were first built.” That is not to say that the buildings should be kept in their “retired” form, but that in cases where any degradation has taken place, a structure should be repaired to how it looked in its original, pristine state. Liang Sicheng’s *xiujiu ruiju*, then, prefers restoration over preservation. Most Chinese tourists have historically ascribed to this view of authenticity, as observed on the ground in a 2004 survey conducted by the team who drafted the *China Principles*. The team found that the majority of Chinese tourists surveyed preferred restoration to preservation at pre-modern historical sites. This preference stands in contrast to the majority of overseas tourists visiting those same historical sites, who preferred preservation to

---

52 Quoted in Weiler and Gutschow, *Authenticity*, xviii.
restoration. This is a more traditional Chinese view of historical authenticity, and stands in contrast to the views held by Chinese conservationists today.

This conflict over the meaning of “authenticity” has resulted in many local developers favoring tourist development over conservation protocols, and therefore restoration over preservation. For local bureaus of development, tourism, and to some degree even cultural heritage, tourism is essential to the provincial and municipal economy and warrants action in favor of drawing tourists rather than adhering to the letter of national law and protocol. While the China Principles and Getty Conservation Institute alike assert that authenticity at Chinese historical sites is “compromised” by over restoration, Liang Sicheng’s own understanding shows a divide between Chinese conservationists today and earlier and popular Chinese understandings of authenticity. Thus, it is not the case that authenticity has been rejected by Chinese tourists, but rather that they have understood the term differently than conservationists: they understand it in a more traditional sense, as “restoring the old as it was.” Needless to say, the implications are quite dramatic. If restoration is preferred, it can drive tourism by appealing directly to a growing domestic Chinese audience—an audience for whom historical value exists not in ruins but in sites that attempt to capture the past not just as it may have looked, but additionally as it may have sounded, felt, smelled, and even tasted to those who had experienced it first-hand (well-manicured topiary shrubs notwithstanding).

Engaging the Senses at Huaqing Hot Springs Palace

Despite Qianling Mausoleum’s fairly striking “before and after” photos, the restoration itself was relatively minimal compared to many other sites in and around Xi’an: much of the necropolis space remains barren where structures once stood, with only those structures that still had clear foundations actually being rebuilt. Where the structures were unknown, visualizing the necropolis site remains an act of speculation for the visitor. Not every historical site in Shaanxi Province lets speculation lie dormant, however. Another site just outside of Xi’an, Huaqing Hot Springs Palace, pushes the act of reconstruction to its limits. Huaqing Hot Springs Palace combines historical knowledge, speculation, and poetic metaphor into an all-encompassing sensory experience that illuminates as it obfuscates and provokes the imagination while limiting

57 See Appendix I, Figure 4.
it. By examining the history of Huaqing as a historical site, both the potentials and limitations of historical reconstruction become much clearer.

The palace as a constructed space has a history tracing back to the Western Zhou nearly 3000 years ago. The Palace was used as an imperial retreat by kings and emperors from its conception all the way to the end of the Qing Dynasty. In 1936, Huaqing additionally served as the temporary prison of Chiang Kai-shek during the Xi’an Incident, where GMD generals Zhang Xueliang and Yang Hucheng forced Chiang Kai-shek to redirect military efforts toward Japan, and not the Communists, during the Japanese Occupation.

The mountainside resort was a second home to nearly three millennia of Chinese kings, emperors, generals, and nobles, but after its “retirement” into historical site in the early 1960s, Huaqing embarked on a dramatically new journey as a tourist destination. As of 2017, Huaqing is incredibly popular with Chinese and other East Asian tourists but virtually unknown by most Western and non-Asian tourists. The site is most well-known among Chinese for the story of Emperor Xuanzong of Tang and his beloved consort Yang Guifei, who, according to historical legend, won the Emperor’s heart and eloped with him to the Hot Springs Palace. The emperor’s absence from government allowed General An Lushan to begin his eponymous rebellion, resulting in the suicide of Yang Guifei and, according to the legend, the eventual spiritual reunion of the two lovers.

The love story of Xuanzong and Lady Yang has been the subject of numerous poems, plays, operas, and films over the centuries since the Tang Dynasty. The first major poem recounting the love affair was Bai Juyi’s Changhen ge, or Song of Everlasting Sorrow, written in 809, approximately fifty years after the historical events transpired. Changhen ge has served as the basis for later literary works recounting the events, including Chen Hong’s Changhen zhuan, a novella-style verse and prose work composed in 813. These two works later served as the

---

58 Interview 5. According to one interviewee, who organizes tour groups for both Chinese and foreign audiences, European and English speaking groups have usually never heard of Huaqing, but the site is popular amongst Chinese language tour groups. While conducting research in Xi’an, I visited Huaqing for an afternoon. Upon requesting a ticket for entry to the site, the ticket-taker wondered if I had gotten off the bus at the wrong stop; she asked in Chinese if I had meant to go to bingmayong, the Terracotta Army, which is the next stop on the tourism bus line. Unlike the Terracotta Army, which I had visited in the morning, I saw no other Western visitors in the bustling crowd at Huaqing.


basis for a number of plays and operas, including Bai Pu’s *Wutong yu*, first performed in the 13th century, and Hong Sheng’s perennially acclaimed Qing Dynasty opera *Changsheng dian*, considered one of the four greatest Chinese dramas of all time.\(^{61}\) In the 20th and early 21st centuries, the story was turned into a number of films and television series, including the 1962 Hong Kong film *The Magnificent Concubine*, the 2010 Chinese television series *The Legend of Yang Guifei*, and the 2015 Chinese film *Lady of the Dynasty*, to name just a few. As we will see shortly, the poetry that serves as the basis for these operas, films, and television series has additionally served as the quasi-historical basis for key elements of the 21st century historical site reconstruction.

Despite the 3000 year history of Huaqing, this tale of a great beauty triggering the decline of an empire has become the beating heart of the historical site to the point of complete reconstruction and reorganization around it, to its absolute limits. Once the original Tang Dynasty bathing pools were rediscovered in 1982, Huaqing began a long process of redevelopment to focus on the love story for which the site is most famous. The first addition after the bathing pool discovery was the construction of a museum structure over the five pools used by Tang royalty, including Xuanzong and Lady Yang themselves.\(^{62}\) Many of the Qing Dynasty structures that were restored in 1956 at the site prior to the discovery of the pools were subsequently removed and replaced with Tang-style architecture in order to reconnect the site with its most famous historical legend.

The pools themselves are still preserved in their condition upon archaeological discovery, drained of water and protected by railings, but the area surrounding the site was redeveloped over the course of the early 2000s into a multi-sensory theme park experience that attempts—or at least appears to attempt—to capture the past “as it was.” One early element of Huaqing’s redevelopment was the addition of *Mengshi tai*, or the “Love Promise Platform,” where young couples can tie a red ribbon with their names to the trees in the center, symbolizing *lianli*, or two “trees” metaphorically intertwining as one.\(^{63}\) In 2005, the legendary *Xuanjing changsheng dian*, or “Palace of Dreamlike Longevity”—namesake of the famous Qing Dynasty play—was reconstructed in Tang architectural style. The building features video clips of actors reenacting

\(^{61}\) Ibid.; Mackerras, “Drama of the Qing Dynasty,” 94.
\(^{63}\) “盟誓台/Love Promise Platform,” Huaqing Hot Springs Palace, photographed June 15, 2016. The romantic and sexual metaphor of *lianli* is fairly obvious.
various scenes of the famous love story, including their final vows of eternal love to one another inside the palace itself.\textsuperscript{64}

Beyond the standard audial and visual elements of historical sites, visitors are also given access to sensory experiences at Huaqing that preserved ruins or only partially reconstructed sites like Qianling simply cannot. Visitors can “smell” the past in an area added to Huaqing in 2010: \textit{Taohua gu} or “Peach Blossom Valley” both functions as a euphemism—\textit{taohua} means literally “peach blossom” or figuratively “love affair”—and provides a physical winding path of peach trees and bench swings where visitors can wander and sit among the fragrance of spring romance.\textsuperscript{65} And while the original Tang Dynasty pools are off limits, visitors can “feel” the past by paying for a foot bath at the Dichen Pool or touching the spring water for free at a fountain that pipes it up at its natural 110 degrees-Fahrenheit temperature.\textsuperscript{66} Visitors wishing to “taste” the past can even purchase fresh lychees or lychee snacks for refreshment, among other concessions: Lady Yang was known to love lychee so much that the Emperor supposedly used his extensive horseback courier system to bring fresh lychee fruit up to Huaqing from the far south before it could spoil.\textsuperscript{67}

Of course, attempts to recreate a historical sensory experience are problematic, given both the limited information available concerning the actual history of Huaqing as well as the highly contextual and time-bound nature of a sensory experience.\textsuperscript{68} In an age when most visitors to Huaqing can readily access the taste of fresh lychee, can easily turn on the tap for hot water, and can visit a park or orchard in spring to smell peach blossoms, the significance of these sensory experiences is only as evocative as the imagination allows and is limited by the increasing banality of now-mundane sensory engagement. Nevertheless, bypassing preservation in favor of extensive reconstruction provides a dramatically different public historical experience for the visitor: by purchasing an entry ticket, the visitor is not simply viewing the remains of past events, but—with proper suspension of disbelief—they can imagine that they are stepping back

\textsuperscript{64}“玄境长生殿/Palace of Dreamlike Longevity,” Huaqing Hot Springs Palace, photographed June 15, 2016.
\textsuperscript{65}“桃花谷/Peach Blossom Valley,” Huaqing Hot Springs Palace, photographed June 15, 2016.
\textsuperscript{66}“涤尘池简介/Dichen Pool Foot Massage [sic],” Huaqing Hot Springs Palace, photographed June 15, 2016.
in time and walking the actual grounds of the palace as it may have looked, sounded, felt, smelled, and tasted.

The financial incentives for this particular style of historical site management are by no means a pittance given the ¥150 entry fee—about $22USD—the highest of any Xi’an area historical site.69 There is a particularly strong draw for couples, too: an observant visitor to Huaqing will see young couples holding hands, hiking across the mountaintop behind the resort, and reenacting rituals from the famed love story. Beyond the entrance fee, too, visitors can pay ¥60 for a cable car ride to the mountaintop temples behind the site, which is a quiet escape from the crowds below. Furthermore, those wishing to witness a dramatic rendition of the love story can buy tickets to an evening theatrical performance that takes place in the center of the palace grounds, performed by hundreds of live actors and accompanied by dazzling special effects. Ticket prices range from ¥228 to ¥588—$33 to $85—depending on how close to the action visitors wish to sit.70 For the full experience, visitors can spend an entire weekend at Huaqing in an adjacent spa-hotel, spending hundreds or even thousands of yuan, all themed to revolve around a single event in the life of the Huaqing Hot Springs Palace.

Unlike the reconstruction at Qianling, which is an attempt to restore the façade of the unvarnished structures to their original form for viewing, Huaqing actively subverts centuries of history to represent a particular historical moment across a variety of sensory modes. Both reconstructions challenge the boundaries of the China Principles and the 1982 Law but to quite different effect. Qianling still separates the visitor from historical events, partly by its nature as a necropolis, but also by the extent to which it was restored: only those structures whose form was documented, known, and partially extant were rebuilt—the remainder of the site was left undeveloped. Huaqing, on the other hand, goes far beyond formal restoration: the structures for which there exists little or no knowledge of design or layout were still reconstructed, but as type, and not as reality. Many of the specific elements and locations created at Huaqing come directly from Bai Juyi’s Song of Everlasting Sorrow: the poem makes explicit reference to the bathing

69 This fee is matched in the area only by the Terracotta Warriors. Out of over a dozen of the most famous and most popular historical sites I visited while in Xi’an, Huaqing and the Terracotta Warriors’ ¥150 (about 22USD) ticket prices were over double the average historical site entrance fee. Once inside the Palace grounds, there are a variety of other purchases to be made beyond those listed, including food, footbaths, and souvenirs.

pools at Huaqing, to the Palace of Dreamlike Longevity, to *taohua*, and to *lianli*. While the bathing pools and Palace of Dreamlike Longevity are known to have existed at Huaqing, references to *taohua* and *lianli* are only poetic metaphors constructed by Bai Juyi, referring to two distinct moments in the couple’s relationship. Nonetheless, these metaphors have been incorporated into physical representation, blending poetry with reality and blurring the lines between historical knowledge and historical memory.

In practice, Huaqing restores the old as it “may have been” and not “as it was” in the pursuit of drawing tourists by focusing on a single historical moment; it is a combination of history, archaeology, and metaphor into a picturesque and almost surreal public historical spectacle. This blending of reality with metaphor and focus on a single moment may breathe new life into an otherwise-silent past, but at the same time it obfuscates the visitor’s historical imagination while ignoring the many centuries of history at Huaqing before and after the Tang—the only exception being for the temporary kidnapping of Chiang Kai-shek, which the site still recognizes and puts on prominent public display.

Huaqing is but one of dozens of reconstructed Chinese historical sites revolving around legends and folk history that blend history with metaphor in this fashion. On the opposite side of Xi’an sits Qujiang Cold Cave Heritage Park, a new site revolving around the Shaanxi folk story of Wang Baochuan, a young noble woman, and Xue Pinggui, her pauper lover who was said to have lived in a cave. This site was developed with municipal government funding and features extensive speculation in design, but notably with full documentation of each extant component—in particular the caves where Xue Pinggui is said to have lived—and the processes of conservation to which those caves were exposed. The remainder of the park above ground is a fabricated theme zone like Huaqing, intended to draw revenue and provide an enjoyable visitor experience while representing a small part of Xi’an’s folk history.

Like Huaqing, Qujiang recreates both actual and imagined history at the site and uses one story as the gateway into a larger historical era that speaks not so much of China’s grand.

---

71 Bai Juyi, 长恨歌 [*Changhen ge*], lines 61 and 118. It was suggested to me by a contact in Xi’an that *taohua* or *taoli hua* taken from the line “春风桃李花开日” [*chun feng tao li hua kai ri*] is a misinterpretation of the text line, as *huakai ri* is the set phrase meant to contrast the end of line 62: “秋雨梧桐叶落时” [*qiu yo wutong ye luo shi*]. If this is the case, references to *taohua* and *taoli hua* present at Huaqing are not only cases of using poetic metaphor as historical source, but may also be misreadings of the source material all together.

72 Weiler, “Chinese Heritage Theme Parks.”

73 Ibid., 243.
imperial past but rather of Xi’an’s own storied past. The difference, however, is that Qujiang, a more recent reconstruction, draws a clearer boundary between the real and the fictive by adhering more closely to recognized conservation practices. To the conservationist and public historian, such fabrications may be recognized as disingenuous to the work of public history, but for the purposes of tourist development, these very fabrications and reconstructions at Qianling, Huaqing, Qujiang, and countless other sites across China seem to be incredibly effective at drawing in tourists and exposing ever-larger audiences to one particular genre of public historical representation.

The issues present at historical “theme parks” such as Huaqing mirror some of those analyzed by Richard Handler and Eric Gable at Colonial Williamsburg in their groundbreaking study *The New History in an Old Museum*, including issues of authenticity and the use of history in constructing a national—or as is the case both national and local—myth and identity.\(^{74}\) As Yujie Zhu argues in his examination of historical sites of China’s *shaoshu minzu* (ethnic minority groups) “[a] site’s existential value is not attached to any historical meaning or archeological evidence. It arises from the people’s marked nostalgia for their heritage.”\(^{75}\) If we consider that the very development of sites like The Henry Ford and Colonial Williamsburg stem from their creators’ own nostalgia for the past and love of country, it is no stretch of the imagination to suggest that the developers of sites of great importance to Xi’an’s history share a similar love of past and place, and conveniently such sites draw tourists who share that love and interest. To sustain such an enterprise, tourists and their income become just as essential to development plans as the historical knowledge the sites are capable of producing, and public history begins its transformation from a nationally regulated ideal into a locally organized production.

However, both time and representational methods set Chinese historical “theme parks” apart from their Western living history counterparts. Even in cases where these premodern historical sites are reconstructed according to best historical and architectural knowledge, the sheer chronological distance to the moments they attempt to represent compounds the difficulty in displaying the past “as it was.” Furthermore, the absence of living history actors from sites such as Huaqing and Qujiang suggests to the visitor less fiction, and more accuracy and authenticity, despite being reproduction-as-speculation: while Huaqing calls to mind a living


history museum like Colonial Williamsburg, the absence of live, period-costumed interpreters and the extensive signage around the site concerning actual and supposed historical events betray speculation. Visitors to Colonial Williamsburg are aware that they are witnessing a show of sorts when they see the town populated by actors, but many Chinese historical “theme parks,” including Huaqing, are populated only by present-day visitors and guides, suggesting reproduction-as-reality, a suggestion only overcome by close attention to detail or significant background knowledge of the site’s reproduction. Such silences may not be intentional, but they are nonetheless disingenuous to the visitor in terms of public historical best practice.

To Preserve and Restore: The Xi’an City Wall and Hanguang Entrance Remains Museum

Restricting a historical site to one specific historical moment, whether by freezing it through acts of preservation or reconstructing it to resemble how it once may have appeared, is in either case an act that limits the historical knowledge that the site makes available to the visiting public. The construction of an on-site museum is often one method by which site administrators, curators, and historians can present the visiting public with a more nuanced and accurate history of a site at various stages in its life. With the act of restoration, however, the construction of the new necessitates the destruction of the old, which limits not only the capacity to which historians and archaeologists can uncover historical knowledge, but it additionally limits the imagination of the visitor to the visibly reconstructed and to the fragments of the past salvaged for museum presentation. In a case like Huaqing, where the historical imagination of the visitor is trapped in a moment in time, where reconstruction is infused with metaphor and speculation, and where existing structures were altered or replaced outright, the lack of a museum that outlines the broader history of the site is a glaring public historical omission. Historians lose, too, when structures are altered, replaced, or removed in the process of reconstruction; if that process is not documented, then what has been destroyed cannot be recovered.

Yet, preservation—which offers far more to professional historians and conservationists in terms of knowledge production—presents its own issues in making historical knowledge accessible to the public. In cases where a site is preserved in ruins, it becomes frozen and locked in a state of seeming emptiness and dereliction, requiring the visitor’s imaginative capacity to assemble together a picture from what little textual or oral information is made available to them.
outside the ruins themselves. A less ruinous site, well-preserved in its moment of “retirement,” mirrors that of a reconstruction, whereby only the historical moment in which the site is preserved is visually and spatially available to the visitor, often hiding its earlier uses, forms, and lives otherwise. In reconstruction and preservation alike, the nature of a historical site is the greatest challenge to its capacity to generate knowledge: earlier versions of sites can rarely be recovered, as structures are destroyed, manipulated, or replaced given the spatial constraints of a site itself, and documentation of earlier forms is usually only incidental, especially the further back the structure goes. Like so many historical sources, historical sites are a conversation across time that can help reveal the past to us, but while they live across time, they occupy one space and leave behind only their final form and the quiet echoes of those that preceded it.

These omissive acts of preservation and restoration, as problematic as they are in their own specific ways, need not be mutually exclusive. To witness an example of a historical site that both preserves and reconstructs while recovering fragments from multiple stages of its life, a tourist can visit the city wall surrounding the heart of Xi’an. The city wall itself has been restored to appear as it once did during the Ming Dynasty, but beneath the reconstruction exists a lesser-known museum devoted to the site’s earlier lives. The Hanguang Entranceway Ruins and Museum, an “in-site” museum at one of the excavated Tang Dynasty gatehouses, is centered around an archaeological excavation of the gatehouse and walls, which presents earlier iterations of the wall in their ruined and excavated state without any acts of reconstruction. In one half of the museum, the centerpiece is the Hanguang Entranceway in excavated ruins, surrounded on two floors by smaller artifacts from the excavation, including wall adornments, roof ornaments, and support columns ranging from the Tang Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty. In the other half of the museum, the temporary exhibition hall, media room, and offices surround a two-story cross section of the wall remains, ranging historically from 581-1912 beginning with the Sui-Tang and continuing through the Late Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties.

The entire museum is housed beneath the reconstructed city wall and is accessible from the top of the wall, which now serves as a 13.7 kilometer cycling path around the heart of Xi’an, a popular recreational attraction for visiting tourists. This method of representation combines

---

76 See Appendix I, Figure 5.
78 See Appendix I, Figure 6.
preservation and reconstruction into one site that allows the visitor to imagine how the wall looked in its glory while at the same time offering for display an older—now defunct—gatehouse and a cross section of the five major periods in the walls’ history, both while still providing the tourist a novelty in cycling around a former military technology. This system opens up the visitor’s historical understanding, providing an image not of static permanence, but instead of dynamic change over the lifespan of the site. Thus, the reconstruction here is not a full omission of historical knowledge but instead one of the multiple methods by which the site attempts to represent the past to the public.

Certainly the nature of a city wall makes this method of simultaneous preservation and restoration possible in ways that other historical sites cannot: the wall as an entity is roughly the same from watchtower to watchtower and gatehouse to gatehouse with intentional uniformity and symmetry. Excavating and displaying one Tang Dynasty gatehouse and one cross section of the wall serves as a fairly accurate representation of the entire structure, unlike most premodern structures. Furthermore, the Xi’an city wall grew larger in height over numerous successive dynasties, often building upon previous layers rather than replacing them outright. As new technologies and materials both allowed for and necessitated a taller, wider wall, the earlier layers became buried rather than destroyed, which makes representations of the site across time possible despite the singularity of the wall’s space.

To apply this model to existing and future sites, then, would require a reconsideration of how a historical site might appear spatially and temporally. A museum is an obvious solution, particularly if the museum makes use of both primary relics from different eras of the site and represents various eras spatially within the various stages of the site’s life. Digital reproductions in the form of mapping and 3D imagery would further allow multiple stages of a site’s life to be reproduced within a single virtual space and would allow active visual recognition of change over time that reconstructions and ruins alike otherwise forbid. While it would be impossible to represent every moment in a site’s life span, and chronological distance usually makes older periods more difficult to represent than newer ones, attempting to reproduce critical or defining moments or eras in the is preferred to only representing a defining moment in the singular.

Once an act of restoration is done, it is virtually impossible to be undone, as restoration means un-writing one moment in a structure’s life in the attempt to return it to another. So long as tourism continues to define the historical site in China, developers and conservationists alike
must consciously consider how each act of preservation or restoration is itself a limitation of the knowledge a site can produce. “Retirement” into historical site is simply one more stage in the life of a given space. If conservationists hope to make the public consciously aware of the history of a site, then we must recognize that way a site is “retired” into a historical site—be it through preservation, restoration, or somewhere in between—shapes how we understand the past and limits the capacity for a historical site to do work which it was never intended to do.

Conclusion: Conservation and its Limits

Despite national laws and protocols, the act of restoration and reconstruction continues largely unabated across China, largely by local forces. Perhaps the most notorious recent case is the Great Wall restoration effort in Liaoning. The provincial bureau of cultural heritage in Liaoning authorized what seemed a routine repair project for one of the most picturesque “wild” segments of the Great Wall in 2014. When images of the final results emerged online in September 2016, however, public outcry spread like wildfire from Liaoning to Beijing and then across the globe. Photos revealed that multiple kilometers of the Wall were filled in with sand, mortar, and cement, that damaged adornments on towers were destroyed, and that the top of the wall was flattened and smoothed, resulting in what appeared to be a winding cement roadway with little resemblance to the Ming Dynasty structure.79 News agencies around the world picked up on the story and reported what many saw as a “botched” job that some compared to “vandalism.”80 However, a representative of the county-level cultural relics bureau claimed that the entire project was approved, authorized, and supervised at each stage according to all existing regulations and guidelines for best practice, so there was nothing technically wrong with their repair project. As of spring of 2017, the issue was under investigation in Beijing by SACH.81

The “botched” repair job brings into question many of the ongoing issues revolving around heritage conservation practices in China since 1949. Concepts of authenticity in China certainly differ from those of the West, but variations on Liang Sicheng’s conception of authenticity as “restoring the old as it was” range from factual reconstructions of an earlier

81 “绥中“最美野长城”遭抹平？ [Suizhong county ‘Most Beautiful Wild Great Wall’ Flattened?]” Huashang Morning News (Liaoning, China), September 21, 2016.
structure to speculative and metaphorical fabrication meant evoke the senses in the pursuit of tourist yuan. In the case of the Great Wall, Badaling and Mutianyu are enjoyed by millions annually in part because the structure is perceived to be “as it was” and can be walked upon as if one were stepping back into the past, which attracts far more tourists than the “wild” sections of the wall preserved in partial ruin and accessible only by hiking. Restoration certainly draws tourists, but the limits of the process have yet to be firmly tested as evidenced in the ongoing conversation between proponents of cultural heritage who wish to merely preserve and regional forces who hope to draw as many tourists as possible. Curiously enough, though, the controversial repair job at Liaoning reportedly drew far more tourists than that particular stretch of the Wall had seen before, if only to gawk at the perceived destruction of China’s past. At the very least, such high profile cases will continue to enliven the debates of historical conservation in China, and the competition between national aims and local outcomes in public history, both of which have no clear end in sight.\(^{82}\)

\(^{82}\) Buckley and Wu, “‘Botched’.”
Chapter 2 – Lost and Found: Representing the Past at Archaeological Sites near Xi’an

When historical sites in China were rediscovered in the 20th and 21st centuries after having been lost for centuries or millennia, archaeologists, historians, and site developers have had to reckon with an entirely different set of issues in terms of historical preservation and public historical representation. Monuments in Xi’an such as Qianling Mausoleum, Huaqing Hot Springs Palace, the city wall, and the various temples and pagodas never vanished from public eye. Rather, they merely transformed in purpose from their earlier lives upon retirement as historical sites. When sites of historical importance become lost and escape public consciousness, however, their archaeological rediscovery often has a profound effect on how they are presented to the public. In the cases of the Terracotta Army, the Banpo Neolithic site, and the Tang West Market, displays and narratives are constructed to make relatable to the present what is past and even make the act of excavation the central theme of the historical narrative.

To understand some of the ways that recently rediscovered historical sites in Xi’an have been developed and presented to the public, I will comparatively examine three popular archaeological site museums in and around Xi’an: the Terracotta Army, the Xi’an Banpo Museum, and the Tang West Market Museum. In each case, the archaeological dig site becomes a showpiece of the museum itself, and in each case the narrative told—no matter how distant the site’s life was from the present—is tied directly to Marxist and Chinese conceptions of progress towards socialism and economic development. However, the ways in which these three spaces present the sites and their narratives differ significantly from one another, making this investigation a microcosmic exploration of variety and diversity within the legal and theoretical limitations of historical narrative production. As I have already claimed, managing historical narratives is a central component to China’s nation-building process, but the way those narratives manifest themselves today suggests that local forces and private enterprise have recently taken it upon themselves to take greater control of narratives previously dominated by state mechanisms.

While English-language museum studies scholarship on China is thriving today, there is little to no scholarship concerning archaeological sites, despite their popularity and significance in the field of public history. Producing such scholarship is difficult, too, as many museums in
China do not archive their signage or materials but simply replace them outright. What follows is a selection of interrelated vignettes of archaeological sites in and around Xi’an, each containing their own permutations of presentism that reflect larger trends in Chinese popular culture and political discourse, despite their frequent disjuncture with contemporary historiography. I hope at the very least here to contribute three additional—if regrettably brief—museum studies from Shaanxi Province, and to further depict a shift in Chinese public history in the late 20th and early 21st centuries whereby tourism and private enterprise are expanding public history and transforming the purposes and narratives of museums to increasingly diverse and localized ends.

A Brief History of Museums in China

The modern Chinese museum is typically considered an import from the West, but Chinese museums have similar ancient and premodern precedents in line with the modern museum of Europe and the United States. Wealthy Chinese elite have long collected and displayed treasures and artwork, much as Western elite collected artwork, curios, and exotica. Additionally, sites of religious and philosophical importance such as the Confucius Temple are often deemed proto-museums by Chinese museologists: such sites both collected relics attributed to important figures in the museum and housed various steles that served in part as a library and in part as a museum-like collection. Su Donghai suggests that the modern Chinese museum was one component of modernization efforts that began in the late 19th century, in part as an import from the British and other Western colonial powers and in part as imitation of the Japanese Imperial Museum established during the Meiji era. However, the corruption and aversion to modernization which plagued the late years of the Qing Dynasty prevented the full development of such museums. With the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the GMD’s solidification of power, however, the new Republic of China put theory into action and transformed the Forbidden City into China’s first national museum, and about a dozen additional museums were constructed in the 1930s shortly thereafter. These new museums were governed by the newly created Chinese Association of Museums, and their development coincided with the boom in

83 Interview 7.
85 Ibid., 64.
Chinese archaeology and conservation that defined Chinese historical work in this new, modernizing, post-imperial era, allowing archaeological finds to fill the museums’ halls.86

This rapid proliferation of major museums and expansion of Chinese historical work into the modern era halted during the ensuing Chinese Civil War and Second World War. It was not until the 1950s under the newly established People’s Republic that museums in China once again began to proliferate. Between 1949 and 1957, the number of museums in China more than tripled from 21 to 72, led by the guidance of former Minister of Culture Shen Yanbing.87 During the late 1950s and the Great Leap Forward, one recounted slogan proclaimed xianxian you bowuguan, sheshe you zhanlanshi (县县有博物馆，社社有展览室): “every county must have a museum, every commune must have an exhibition hall,” suggesting that museums were part and parcel to the project of modernity through Marxism and Maoism.88

The Cultural Revolution led to relative chaos in Chinese museums, however, as political goals and Maoism collided in conflict with one another, resulting in the closing and often emptying of museums across the country, depending upon local political circumstances.89 After the end of Cultural Revolution and Deng Xiaoping’s solidification of power, museums took on what is essentially their current flavor: they are administered by SACH and are increasingly international in their focus, with many museum workers members of the Chinese Society of Museums founded in 1982 and larger institutions participating in international organizations such as the International Council on Museums, or ICOM (not to be confused with the aforementioned ICOMOS, the International Council on Monuments and Sites, a partner organization of ICOM).90

It is largely within the context of the post-Mao era that the museums discussed below were developed. While a few museums such as the Xi’an Banpo Museum and the Shaanxi Provincial Museum were originally established prior to the Cultural Revolution, their current management and production are decidedly part of the era of museums after 1978. Scholars have noted that SACH is the official administrating body of museums in China, but the local forces involved in producing museums, including provincial and municipal bureaus of cultural heritage, the tourism industry, and private investment, work within the guidelines established by SACH

86 Ibid., 64-66.
87 Ibid., 66.
88 Varutti, 29.
89 Ibid.
and other national bodies and ordinances to transform their own archaeological spaces into tourist destinations of different sorts.

The Knowledge of Archaeology: Silences at the Terracotta Army Museum

“Have you seen the Terracotta Army yet?” To visit Xi’an as a foreigner is to inevitably hear the question again and again, and for good reason: the Terracotta Army is arguably one of the most important archaeological discoveries in Chinese history, and perhaps even the greatest archaeological find of the 20th century worldwide. It is hailed as “China’s second most important tourist site after the Great Wall” and claims status as the “Eighth Wonder of the World” throughout the museum site.91 In the past decade, the clay statues have received nearly five million visitors per year at the site itself and are viewed by millions more annually around the globe at traveling exhibitions.92 When a dozen of the warrior statues first invaded the British Museum in 2007, they became the museum’s most visited exhibition in 35 years, outmatched only by the royal visit of Egypt’s boy king, Tutankhamun.93 The archaeological site itself touts a record-breaking single day attendance estimate of 460,000 visitors on National Day (October 194) in 2012, a claim complete with photographic evidence of the throng of visitors clamoring to witness the throng of statues.94

The Terracotta Army was officially discovered in 1974, although locals knew of the existence of ancient pottery and statues for decades prior and made little of the “discovery” at first, as statues from the site had already been discovered and placed in museums, in temples, and even on kitchen tables by local farmers.95 The army was constructed as one component of the larger necropolis of China’s first Emperor, Qin Shihuang, whose short-lived Qin Dynasty (221-206BCE)—origin of “China” in English—was the first unification of all Han-Chinese kingdoms under a single rule. The necropolis was one of multiple large construction projects conducted by the Qin Emperor, including the first unification project of the Great Wall. A significant portion of the site remains unexcavated, including the burial chamber of the Emperor

95 Man, The Terra Cotta Army, 7-15.
himself. After a local museum employee deduced that the statues and bronze arrowheads discovered were coming from the first Emperor’s tomb, a journalist forwarded the news to the Central Committee, who quickly sent an archaeologist from Beijing to authenticate the find.\textsuperscript{96}

The most incredible feature of the archaeological discovery of the Terracotta Army is not just its ability to attract millions of visitors, but in the museum’s capacity to ignore much of the historical context of the statues by focusing almost entirely on the history of the excavation rather than the Qin Emperor for whom the necropolis was constructed. Prior to the discovery of the Terracotta Army, Emperor Qin Shihuang was remembered across millennia, from China’s grand historian Sima Qian of the first century BCE through the early Communist period, “not as a hero, but as a tyrant.”\textsuperscript{97} This narrative was shaped primarily from Sima Qian’s writing, with little deviation: for over two thousand years, Emperor Qin Shihuang has been known for executing scholars, burning books, and exploiting laborers to construct the Great Wall and other massive construction projects. One historical account of the death toll of workers during the construction of the wall suggested that the wall would never be completed until ten thousand men had been buried. The emperor’s advisers responded by finding a man named \textit{Wan} (\textit{jī}), meaning literally “ten thousand,” and buried him in the wall to fulfill the prophecy.\textsuperscript{98} As Sima Qian claims in his \textit{Records of the Grand Historian}, upon completion of Qin Shihuang’s necropolis, “the inner gate was closed off and the outer gate lowered, so that all the artisans and craftsmen were shut in the tomb and unable to get out.”\textsuperscript{99} While the main burial mound to which Sima Qian referred still remains unopened, the recently-discovered mass graves and workers skeletons from excavations around the site suggest that the necropolis, like the Great Wall, was a project soaked in blood.

At the Terracotta Army Museum and Site itself, these deeds for which China’s first Emperor became so infamous are entirely absent. In fact, there is virtually no reference to the history or significance of Emperor Qin Shihuang in any capacity, save for his central role in the construction of the Terracotta Army. Unlike other archaeological site museums in Shaanxi Province, most of the “history” of the site extends only back to its discovery in 1974, with historical references focusing on China’s early technological prowess and craftsmanship. The

\textsuperscript{96} Man, \textit{The Terra Cotta Army}, 210-213.  
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 108.  
Pit 1 Preface claims that the statues represent “high technology in Chinese sculptural history.”

Additional signs make clear that the historical significance of the objects exists in their manufacture: a sign at Pit 1 describes the firing process and proclaims that the statues were “exquisitely made with ancient high technology.” At Pit 2, a display of some of the weapons held by statues informs the visitor that chrome-plating technology—ostensibly used on Qin weapons—was invented in China 2,200 years prior to its invention in Germany in 1937.

Beside that display, another sign goes into detail as to how the weapons were manufactured and chrome-plated, demonstrating “that metallurgy of Qin era reached a High level and the manufacture of weapons started to be standardized.”

Beyond technology, it is a museum of silences, as the objects unearthed are meant to narrate the story themselves. Signage at the museum refers to the physical layout of the dig site, contained within three sprawling hangars put in place to protect the statues, archaeologists, and visitors alike from the elements. Signs in Hangar 1—where the vast majority of soldiers are located—outline variously the makeup of the army itself, the elaborate processes by which each figure was sculpted, fired, and painted, the bronze metalworking used to craft the soldiers’ weapons, and the scientific processes by which each newly-unearthed object is removed, examined, and catalogued. It echoes an early natural history museum, classifying the objects and arranging knowledge categorically but providing little to no context for their existence outside of the technological feats by which they were produced.

The dig is still active, as only 2,000 of the 8,000 soldiers and horses presumed to lay buried beneath the earth have been uncovered. The process of excavation is in itself a centerpiece of the site: rather than examining and documenting all of the figures and objects in a separate facility, some of the archaeological work is done in open view in the center of the hangar, a process which museum signage explains through photos and text and which tour guides frequently explicate for their tour groups.

---

100 “前言/Preface.”
three hangars that cover Pits 1, 2, and 3, tells a similar tale of the site as a place of archaeological work and technological significance alone. The only contextual information available comes from a short film that visitors can view in the on-site museum, which John Man notes prefers dramatization over historical accuracy. Instead, the museum contains extensive photographs of the excavation process that began in 1974 and focuses on the founding of the museum and opening of the site to the public. Most of the objects excavated from the pits remain housed in the pits, positioned in display cases within the hangar structures, or sent on tour around the globe, rendering the site museum only sparsely populated with artifacts from the dig: those displays that do focus on objects from the excavation explain how they were manufactured, just as the hangar displays do. Besides the few artifacts on display in the exhibition hall, prominent museum objects include early articles published about the site’s discovery—framed behind glass—and plaques certifying the site as a UNESCO World Heritage site and an AAAAA Tourism Destination, the highest grade issued by the China National Tourism Administration. The introductory sign at the entrance to the museum even asserts that the Qin yong ren (秦俑人), referring to the people who have worked on the excavation and in the museum, “have their new dreams: to build a leading museum in the world, and to build a world class tourist destination in the world.”

In this manner, the site museum is quite literally a “site museum,” devoted not to the history of the Qin Emperor or Qin China as a whole but instead to technology and to the history of the excavation process and its display to the public. It is a museum about archaeology first, technology second, and not about the history that such archaeology and technology has revealed. It has nothing to say about what Emperor Qin Shihuang did by unifying China under his rule but everything to say about what the discovery has meant for China. While officially the site is designated as Qin shihuangdi ling bowuguan (秦始皇帝陵博物院) or “Emperor Qin Shihuang’s Mausoleum Site Museum,” the colloquialisms used to refer to the site in both English and Chinese reveal what is truly on display: the words bingmayong (兵马俑) are in the titles of tour packages, emblazoned on the sides of tourist buses, and form the pinyin initials of the museum’s

---

106 Man, The Terra Cotta Army, 194. The segment in particular that Man discusses is the dramatic breaking and entering of the tomb and burning of interior supports, which the film depicts as a quick act of vandalism, but that Man and other scholars suggest was the result of a decades-long smolder, akin to a coal-seam fire.
107 See Appendix I, Figure 7.
Bingmayong means literally “soldier and horse funerary statues,” akin to the “Terracotta Army” designation granted to the site in English, and describes fairly accurately where the site places its focus. Those wishing to learn the history and significance of the Qin Emperor or the cultural backdrop to the site’s construction are left wanting, for all they can hope to learn without bringing a trusted and informative tour guide is how the site has been painstakingly managed in order to preserve and display China’s artistic and technological heritage, evident in the namesake statues. In the pursuit of displaying China and Xi’an’s rich, deep history of art, science, and craftsmanship, the archaeologists themselves are on display just as much as the army, but their Emperor is nowhere to be found.

Marxist Lessons from the Past at Xi’an Banpo Museum

Unlike the Terracotta Army Museum, the Xi’an Banpo Museum is more than willing to outline the significance of China’s history, or—as is the case at Banpo—China’s prehistory. The Xi’an Banpo Museum is an exemplary tale of archaeology merging with Marxist historical theory, together proclaiming to the public a clear and orderly understanding of the place of the Neolithic in the larger scope of Chinese history. The Banpo archaeological site and its accompanying museum lie just on the outskirts of Xi’an proper, easily accessible from the second-to-last stop on Line 1 of the Xi’an Metro: it is almost impossible to miss, as the Metro stop is called simply “Banpo,” and the metro station architecture and artwork replicate the forms and patterns of the artifacts therein. The site itself was an early agrarian settlement of the Neolithic period whose primary economic activities were farming, gathering, and hunting, with a variety of craft manufactures including pottery, weaving, and bone-tools. The on-site museum contains many of the artifacts found at the excavation site, which is enclosed in a hangar similar to the ones used at the excavation site of the Terracotta Army, but of much smaller proportions. Like the Terracotta Army, the excavation site and hangar are part of the public museum display, with diagrams, models, videos, and artifacts positioned around the central dig, but unlike the Terracotta Army, the process of archaeology at Banpo has long since been completed.

Excavation of the site began in 1954 shortly after its discovery in 1953 and was opened to the public four years later in 1958 as part of the large proliferation of museums during the Great

109 “半坡人的劳动生产/Labor and Production of Banpo Ancestors,” Xi’an Banpo Museum, photographed June 11, 2016.
Leap Forward. What is most notable about the site is not uniqueness of Banpo as a Neolithic site—it is one of dozens of such sites that existed in the Shaanxi plain (albeit one of the better preserved ones)—but rather the language in use in the museum signage. The historical language used refers to Marxist historical and anthropological theories that have been overturned by Chinese and English-language scholars alike but continue to coat the walls of the museum. The theory in question is the Morgan-Engels theory of family structures, which was popular in the Maoist period when the excavation was underway. The theory, which is rooted in Marxist historiography as the name suggests, argued that Neolithic settlements were composed largely of matriarchal family and community power structures, which were disintegrated after the Neolithic period when land ownership brought forth a patriarchal reorganization of society.

Chinese historical and archaeological scholarship shifted away from these theoretical models as early as the 1980s due to lack of strong evidence and pieces of counter-evidence. However, Xi’an Banpo Museum signage and audio guides continue to express these ideas as a central theme and tenet of the significance of the site and the Neolithic era: “Whenever an important decision was to be made, the female head would preside over a meeting on the square before the larger house which was in the center of the tribe and discussed it with all the members on an equal footing. The decision was reached by the female head of society, which was the law of matriarchal society.” Other signage refers to the societal structure as a “matriarchal clan” which formed “mutual blood ties by women,” and asserts that women were the primary economic producers as well as figures of highest political importance in the community. Perhaps the best encapsulation of this is the first of two quotes used as the introduction to the museum from the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi, which reads  

"民知其母不知其父\(^\text{115}\)" \(\text{(民知其母不知其父)}\). The museum translates as “one knows his mother, not knowing his father,” referencing the matriarchal nature of the society that the museum proclaims. The installation of the quote, as well as most of the signage, is undated, but signage which does feature dating

\(^{110}\)“不可忘却的记忆/Eternal Remembrance,” Xi’an Banpo Museum, photographed June 11, 2016.


\(^{112}\)Ibid., 11.

\(^{113}\)“倾听人类文明的足音, 观赏人类童年的气派/Listening to the Rhythm of Human Civilization, Admiring the Childhood Manner of Human Beings,” Xi’an Banpo Museum, photographed June 11, 2016.


\(^{115}\)See Appendix I, Figure 8. The other quote from Zhuangzi reads “日出而作 日落而息” (\textit{richu’ erzuo rilaowei}) or “Setting to work at sunrise and resting at sunset,” referring to the hours of agricultural work that began in the Neolithic.
has been installed as recently as 2008 and features new archaeological discoveries from 2002, which suggests that at least part of the narrative is updated regularly to account for new information, but that decades-old trends in historical theory have either been overlooked or rejected in favor of a more strictly Marxist (or Marxist-feminist) narrative. The latter seems the most clear and obvious case. Like most museums in China, Xi’an Banpo Museum is provincially owned and operated, and therefore it is no great surprise that such language, despite being considered outdated amongst many Chinese archaeologists, is still used for public consumption, given significant local party control of such narratives. As Li Liu notes, the Morgan-Engels model has been “amalgamated with the new concept of nationalism and its applications in archaeology, together forming the core components in the reconstruction of national history.”116 Here, matriarchy appears to be a local flavor of Marxist history, out of line with prevailing theory used in the National Museum, but still appealing enough to a curator or municipal party member to warrant its continued display.

Alongside the matriarchal model, two additional recurring themes appear throughout museum signage at Banpo: difficult but egalitarian lifestyles and civilizational progress. One sign asserts that “[i]n this primitive public ownership society, there is no rank difference and class division has not yet formed,” outlining a fully-egalitarian society using anachronistic terms like “public ownership” to refer to the societal structure of Banpo, and goes on to note that while their material goods were “relatively deficient,” it was a “beautiful scene of equality, stability and harmony of early agricultural society.”117 Another sign notes that “Banpo men made no difference between ‘noble’ and ‘humble’ among tribal members, they only had a labor division among men and women and a distinction between the young and old, thus leading a life of primitive communism.”118 Here, the signage directly invokes Marxist language to refer to the societal structure of Banpo. Further language used includes descriptions of ornaments as “crude” but with “innocence and simplicity,” and outlines the path of human history after the Neolithic as leading to “social division of labor” as “human beings step by step move toward today.”119

This sort of language is not uncommon at historical sites, museums, and even religious tourism sites in China given the centrality of Marxist historical theories to the development of a

117 Ibid.
118 “人类文明的足音/Rhythm of Human Civilization,” Banpo.
119 “装饰品/Ornaments,” Xi’an Banpo Museum, photographed June 11, 2016.; “劳动生产/Labor and Production.”
firm historical identity for the People’s Republic. The difference between Banpo and other historical sites, however, is the degree to which historical knowledge is available from other sources and can be incorporated at the site itself. For a typical historical site, there are often contemporaneously written sources that can either help explain the site’s history or at least contextualize the site in broad historical terms. For a prehistorical site, however, the only sources available are the archaeological remains excavated and the theoretical models that archaeology and anthropology generate. Thus, there is no chronicler, no imperial historian, no Sima Qian, to help tell the story of the site. Instead Banpo must rely on theory to fill in narrative gaps. Because Banpo was opened to the public well before the 1982 law that extended significant power to provincial and municipal bureaus of cultural heritage, it was likely governed with greater narrative control by SACH at its outset. It is likely that Banpo as an older museum and historical site has lagged behind in narrative updates in a way that newer or more popular museums attempt to keep up-to-date, so to speak.

Beyond textual and visual engagement with history, Xi’an Banpo Museum provides experiential learning opportunities to help reveal the “childhood” of humanity, as the museum texts proclaim, at the Banpo Primitive Cultural Village. The Village, which is located behind the museum and excavation hangars, contains mock reconstructions of Neolithic living structures. Each structure contains a different craft workshop and demonstration that visiting children can learn about by watching craftsmen produce Neolithic tools and objects and by participating in hands-on activities as well. This model has apparently been successful in the eyes of the bureau of cultural heritage, as it is being reproduced at Erlitou, a site of a similar nature and public historical design in a neighboring province. Erlitou is a later Neolithic settlement in the Yellow River plain just outside of present day Luoyang. Currently, scholars are attempting to determine whether or not Erlitou is the site of the legendary Xia Dynasty, said to have existed prior to the earliest-confirmed Chinese kingdom of the Shang. The site has been excavated since its discovery in 1959, shortly after the discovery of the Banpo site, and is currently being developed by the Luoyang municipal government’s cultural heritage bureau. The plans for the site include a museum and cultural ruins park to display artifacts found at the site and protect the ruin foundations of the site, akin to Banpo’s hangar structures. Additionally, the museum park will feature buildings and workshops modeled on the site ruins to simulate craft activities and scenes

120 Liu, The Chinese Neolithic, 226.
of life, much in the same manner as Banpo’s Primitive Cultural Village. What is notable about this effort is that, like Banpo, Erlitou is being developed at the local level by the city of Luoyang’s bureau of cultural heritage: despite both sites’ significance to China’s national history and the legal implications of that fact, they are operated—and advertised—by local forces who have far greater stakes in drawing visitors than SACH.

What remains to be seen at Erlitou, however, is the narrative that the museum itself will tell to visitors curious about the Chinese Neolithic, but it would be unsurprising if the site suggested that Erlitou was the capital of the Xia, thereby extending China’s long history back centuries further and putting Luoyang back on the map by giving solid, physical evidence that the city may in fact be the first capital of ancient China. What is clear is that Banpo is one of the many sites of which Xi’an is proud, and attempts to make directly relevant to the visitor the “lessons” of the past: the equanimity of primitive communism on display at Banpo is not merely a fact of the past but a historical learning opportunity as China industrializes and modernizes, and an example of an ideal and progressive society of the distant past in a city otherwise lagging behind coastal China in economic development.

Barbarians and Businessmen at the Tang West Market Museum

In 2006, a private development group began excavating what was to be the largest shopping complex in Western China, when they struck gold—and silver, silk, porcelain, and more. Upon further investigation, they learned that they had found the lost site of the Tang West Market: the Chinese terminus of the Silk Road, where foreign merchants traded their silver, gold, and domestic goods for Chinese goods. Upon their serendipitous discovery, the development group renamed themselves the Tang West Market Group and completely redesigned their construction plans to make their archaeological find the centerpiece of a new cosmopolitan-oriented shopping and entertainment complex. After the find, the Tang West Market Group retained rights over the archaeological site and museum in an unprecedented move: on April 7th,
2010, the Tang West Market Museum opened as the People’s Republic’s first privately owned and operated on-site history museum.124

Surrounded by shops, restaurants, and hotels, the privately owned and operated Tang West Market Museum may be a glimpse toward the even more localized and privatized future of Chinese public history. Like Banpo, the Tang West Market Museum offers fairly clear and consistent thematic language throughout, but to quite different ends than Banpo. The museum’s nature as a representative of a site of international commerce as well as its private ownership have contributed to a unique form of socialist teleology that identifies individual effort and accomplishment as a key driver to social progress. It is in part a reversal of the collectivist narrative of socialism found in other museums in China, and it reflects China’s recent self-reconceptualization as “socialist with Chinese characteristics” while disagreeing with some less savory notions of the nature of the capitalist class in the same turn.

Just as the Xi’an Banpo Museum frames the Neolithic past as a lesson for the present, so too does the Tang West Market Museum generate historical narratives with serious contemporary ramifications. In depictions of the “foreign” or “barbarian” hu (胡), the Tang West Market Museum asserts that during the Tang Dynasty, the West Market exemplified China’s “inclusiveness of all senses and the spirit of learning from other people.”125 No mention is made of the fraught political relationships of alternating war and alliance with the northern hu; the museum instead focuses on the reception of foreigners at market, primarily as guests, not as adversaries. This narrative of the hu directly parallels contemporary discourse surrounding China’s shaoshu minzu (少数民族), or officially recognized ethnic minorities, many of whom are considered the hu’s descendants. After many of the shaoshu minzu had been geographically and politically integrated into the People’s Republic in Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, and elsewhere, public political discourse and education began to frame them as co-existing members of Chinese society at large.

Among the most prominent parallels in the Tang West Market Museum’s depictions of the hu and the pop cultural depictions of the shaoshu minzu, emphasis on song, dance, and

---

eroticism are particularly pronounced. Dru C. Gladney argues that in the construction of Han-
ness, China’s ethnic minority—the other—has been cast as exotic and limited to specific cultural
traits: “One cannot be exposed to China without being confronted by its ‘colorful’ minorities. They sing, they dance; they twirl, they whirl.”126 Emily Wilcox has further argued that minority
song and dance are integral components of both Chinese popular culture and political
propaganda.127 Indeed, just as minority song and dance are front and center during Chinese New
Year television celebrations and holiday parades, so too is hu song and dance on display at the
Tang West Market Museum: of the three major displays devoted to the hu, two focus exclusively
on song, dance, and eroticism, while the third discusses their “exotic” and “colorful” clothing.128
The titles of each display informs the content therein: huji jiusi (胡姬酒肆), lit. “hu tavern girls,”
discusses the “charming dances and fine wines” of hu women, attracting men to the market.129
Huyue huwu (胡乐胡舞), lit. “hu music and dance,” and proclaims that “the music and dances
were the most attractive part” of hu culture in the Tang Dynasty.130 As Marc S. Abramson aptly
notes, “the attribution of superior skill at singing and dancing” among the non-Han during the
Tang Dynasty is “a stereotype that is still held by many Han today regarding other ethnic
groups.”131 This has been recognized widely in Chinese popular culture and contemporary
political discourse from the traditional dress minorities wear to political meetings to the flag-
bearing children at the Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony, and everywhere in between: even
the non-Han in the historical museum does not escape reduction to song, dance, and exotic
otherization.

Furthermore, the Tang West Market Museum follows a trend in Chinese museums of
utilizing historical narratives in order to demonstrate civilizational progress on a grand timescale
while hearkening back to China’s—and Xi’an’s—premodern past. The once-common conflict
found in Maoist histories of the premodern being simultaneously feudal and backwards while
being evidence of China’s rich heritage has since become no real contest: as Kirk A. Denton
remarks, “the negative Maoist critique of feudal darkness and class oppression has gradually

126 Dru C. Gladney, “Representing Nationality in China: Refiguring Majority/Minority Identities,” The Journal of
Asian Studies 53, no. 1 (February 1994), 95.
https://cpianalysis.org/2015/05/06/minority-dance-minority-dancers/
128 “胡姬酒肆/Customs of the Hu People.”
eroded” and been replaced by “identification with the glories of the imperial past,” representative of China’s (re)emergence onto the world stage. Like Banpo’s mostly positive depiction of primitivism, the Tang West Market Museum’s depiction of feudal commerce is in Xi’an a positive one, representing a revision of a distinct stage in the larger Marxist teleology and a positive image of Xi’an in the otherwise feudal darkness of the Marxist narrative. Concerning the exchange of new species of crops and domesticated animals between China and the West, one museum sign claims that the importation of Western goods “pushed forward mankind’s civilization and social progress.” Another sign asserts that exchange of silk, “the quintessence” of China, “promoted the spread of sericulture and filiculture techniques, boosted the development of the world textile industry and advanced the[sic] human civilization.” The museum grounds this argument by discussing the realities of commercial development, suggesting that “[t]he prosperous business of the West Market promoted the development of its finance,” but making clear that it was never a laissez-faire system: another sign states that the bureaucratic entities who controlled the West Market were established “for regulating market price” and “stabilizing market supply … [making] regular exchange of goods possible.”

Perhaps the most striking series of displays at the Tang West Market Museum is the final section of the permanent museum exhibition, entitled Shengshi qianqiu xushanghun: Xishi jiahua (盛世千秋续商魂:西市佳话), shortened by the museum to “Stories of Success” in English, which features legends of the Western Market in its heyday. This section exercises a linguistic balancing act that bridges some of the conflicts between individual effort, private enterprise, and socialist progressive goals all in revised Marxist terms. One of the legends describes Dou Yi, son of a noble family who, through “wise strategy and effective management,” managed to transform what was previously a wasteland into prime real estate, making him “a millionaire through the investment.” Another legend tells of Song Qing, a famed druggist, who “treated his customers equally well with no regard to their social status or wealth” and “even wrote off the debts of people who were too poor to pay [them] off.” A third historical figure, Wang

---

132 Denton, Exhibiting the Past, 32-33.
Jiuhu, a “well-to-do merchant in the West Market,” partook in his own acts of charity: he is recounted as having donated 300,000 strings of coins to rebuild the Chang’an city wall after the uprising of Huang Chao, and donated further 100,000 strings of coins to renovate Anguosi Temple.\textsuperscript{138} The significance of these acts is not left up to the imagination of museum-goer, either: at the end of the recounted legend, the sign makes clear that “[t]his shows that the wealthy merchants of the West Market had a strong sense of social responsibility.”\textsuperscript{139} So too do the wealthy merchants of the Tang West Market Group, granted the privilege of privately operating an on-site history museum, attempt to demonstrate this sense of social responsibility by making the museum free to all visitors, which is more often the exception than the norm in China today.

These stories, which their introduction claims contain “good lessons for people to learn” concerning “commercial wisdom and business ethics,” share similar thematic notes to that of Xi’an Banpo Museum in terms of justice and equanimity to society, but are rooted in benevolent individualism, and not in primitive communalism like that of the Neolithic Banpo.\textsuperscript{140} Here, individual work ethic and social responsibility are praised in the museum narrative, reflecting well the rapidly modernizing and privatizing Chinese economy, and—in the case of the “wealthy merchants” with “a strong sense of social responsibility”—ring of self-praise by the Tang West Market Investment Group’s private enterprises. In fact, the museum itself can be seen as an act of social responsibility on the part of the Group, who changed both their name and their shopping complex plans in accordance with their seemingly fateful discovery of the Western Market site: the directors of the museum are quick to note at every occasion that unlike most other museums and historical sites in China, they offer admission free of charge to all visitors.\textsuperscript{141}

It is this very sort of Gilded Age style public contribution that calls to mind the emergence of the American museum in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries: the doors of history, art, and culture are made available to the public from the benevolent wallets of the well-to-do. While the motives behind the act differ—the Tang West Market Museum as a free attraction conveniently brings guests into the center of a sprawling shopping complex—the message is similar: wealth and generosity—or free enterprise and socialist ideals—are not mutually exclusive. Such is a

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{141} “Museum Listed in the ‘First-class.’”
narrative that would have been unthinkable in a Chinese museum just a decade or two earlier, especially one managed at the national level.

Admission to the Tang West Market Museum may be free, but unlike Xi’an Banpo Museum, interactive and engaged learning comes at a price at the new Western Market. While Xi’an Banpo Museum’s admission fee includes access to the Banpo Primitive Cultural Village, the 21st Century Tang West Market—the much larger complex surrounding and including the museum site itself—has created a fully commercialized interactive learning experience. One of Xi’an’s largest five star hotels is located within the complex on a large square that hosts concerts and other acts periodically. Another part of the redevelopment plan after discovering the West Market site was the incorporation of a new “Silk Road Cultural Street.”142 Restaurants and shops along this long and winding pedestrian-only street are organized by country and culture as associated with the Silk Road in Chinese history, stretching from Japan and Korea on one end past India, Persia, Southeast Asia, and ending in the Near East and Europe, with architecture designed to reflect their respective cultures, and all varieties of foods and consumer goods for sale made in or made to resemble those cultures. For those seeking a more traditional shopping experience, there is also a massive retail mall as was originally planned before the site’s discovery.

Back in the museum itself, too, the Tang West Market Museum serves as a center for commerce, exchange, and cultural and political diplomacy. Inside of the glass-floored atrium, which gives a direct view of the archaeological site below, the museum holds film screenings and art exhibitions, and has even hosted international economic forums for President Xi Jinping’s “New Silk Road” development plans.143 The site is of course historically significant, and its representations make it known: unlike the Terracotta Army Museum, which largely shies away from historical context, the Tang West Market Museum places its historical and symbolic significance front and center, and goes further to make its contemporary significance—and by extension Xi’an’s—known by making the old West Market and Silk Road terminus the historical pearl in the center of a sprawling commercial and entertainment hub.

What the Tang West Market Museum offers is a potential glimpse into the future of Chinese public history where it is increasingly privatized, and the messages contained within reflect as much—at least to the extent with which private investors and their museum administrators can produce their own historical narratives. Whether Tang West Market Museum is an outlier and oddity or a harbinger of what is to come, its uniqueness allows us to see the limits to which historical narratives can be adjusted based on circumstance and which elements of narrative still adhere to popular imagery and official political discourse. Furthermore, the Tang West Market Museum and its extensive opportunities to “purchase” the past at the surrounding Silk Road Cultural Street point towards a commodification of the past already common in tourist zones throughout the world, and clearly emerging in China at a breakneck pace. The Tang West Market Group’s entire reputation is dependent upon attracting visitors who will spend money at the various shopping centers, entertainment outlets, and hotels which they own in the plaza, so for them, public history is a way to carve out their own space, localizing the process of historical significance even further than before.

Conclusion: Molding History to Local Ends

There is no doubt that Chinese public historical narratives adhere in some fashion to official Party doctrine, but it is clear that such narratives are considerably mutable, and may in fact be growing even more flexible as public historical enterprises—including tourism and museums—privatize and are developed by local forces. Even foreign exhibitions of objects from these sites are provincially managed: one such traveling exhibition from the Terracotta Army entitled “China’s Terracotta Warriors: The First Emperor’s Legacy,” was organized not by SACH or any national organization, but instead by the Shaanxi Provincial Cultural Relics Bureau and the Shaanxi Cultural Heritage Promotion Centre, based in Xi’an. Furthermore, the Shaanxi Provincial Museum retains control over most relics found in and around the former Han and Sui-Tang capital Chang’an, meaning traveling exhibitions of Tang-era artifacts are additionally controlled by provincial rather than national forces, rendering the National Museum in Beijing a partner institution to its provincial counterparts, despite its centrality and recognition

144 Liu Yang, China’s Terracotta Warriors: The First Emperor’s Legacy (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2012).
otherwise. Some museums like Banpo do not stretch too far beyond older narratives, but others such as the Tang West Market Museum work to put Xi’an back on the map, make a name for their investors, and increase profits by privatizing, publicizing, and commercializing history.

As always, painting broad pictures like the three I have presented here paves the way for more questions than such pictures often answer themselves, meaning further research is essential. Beyond contributing basic information and broad interpretations of museums that are a wealth of analytic potential and certainly deserve more attention to detail, I have suggested above that Chinese public historical narratives in museums are more diverse and flexible than is often assumed or argued outright: previous studies of the highly regulated narratives in national-level museums have been a valuable foundation for this investigation but serve mostly as a jumping-off point when engaging with provincially and municipally governed institutions. As is the case in so many areas of Chinese society and culture, the official guidelines and regulations from Beijing filter down to the provincial and municipal levels with significant leeway to implement policy as fits specific necessary conditions. In my own research, this appears to be the case with provincial and municipal museums: provided curators do not completely reject the prevailing Marxist-turned-neoliberal narratives, they have the capacity to take rein of the details.

---

145 Interview 7.
Chapter 3 – Going Off Script: The Role of the Tour Guide in Chinese Public History

Reading the museum as a text, as was part of my pursuit in Chapter 2, is the primary mode of analysis of museum studies and has been applied to numerous museums and historical sites in China. However, if the museum is considered a text, we must then consider the visitor to the museum to be a “reader,” which, in the case of larger museums or museums that predominantly operate in a single language, is problematic. First, if the visitor is not “reading” the entire museum as they would a physical text, then the exercise fails to account for selectivity or “skimming” on the part of the visitor. Second, if the materials in the museum exist outside of the native language of the visitor, they are unable to literally “read” the museum, and must rely entirely on visual assumptions. In China—in particular in large provincial museums—we cannot understand public historical narratives by simply “reading” the museum as a text, as visitors have neither the time, nor often the capacity, to do so themselves. Instead, we must examine the actual conduit through which the public historical narrative is being created. That conduit is the tour guide.

To understand the production of public historical narratives in China, I focus on the development of the tourism industry and its relationship to historical sites and museum in the city of Xi’an from the early 1990s to the present day, paying particular attention to the role of the tour guide in the transmission of narratives to various publics, both foreign and domestic. After briefly outlining a history of tourism in China from 1954 to 1989, I examine the reasons why tour guides, museum interpreters, and museum docents chose to pursue their respective careers, what their training entailed, and how this changed over the course of the past two decades. I then explore the conflict that exists between the physical script or guidebook which these professionals are given and the expectations of the tour guide as a member of the private service industry versus the museum interpreter or docent as government employees. Finally, I examine the ways in which tour guides resolve the conflict between historical accuracy and tourist engagement through the construction of a changing, situationally mutable narrative of public history, which is the actual narrative to which the public is often being exposed, and not merely an analysis in literary theory. The highly individual nature of the tour guide and the narratives they produce are yet one more example of the localization of public history: through the tour

146 The most in-depth textual reading of museums in China today is Kirk A. Denton’s *Exhibiting the Past.*
guide, historical narratives take on their own flavor and focus, transforming an official narrative into countless variations thereof.

A Brief History of Tourism in the People’s Republic of China

The history of tourism in the People’s Republic of China has three distinct periods. The first two periods are separated by the set economic reforms begun in 1978 under Deng Xiaoping, and the current period was separated by the second with global and domestic reactions to violence in Tiananmen Square in 1989. Historian Anthony Miller refers to the first period of Chinese tourism as the “Maoist Era” and the second era as the “Era of Market Tourism.”¹⁴⁷ These first two periods of tourism have already been studied by historians and sociologists, and—for the most part—precede the mass proliferation of thousands of museums and historical sites in China, which began to grow exponentially only after the 1980s (and most dramatically in the 2000s).¹⁴⁸ I therefore focus my examination of the tour guide and public history within this third period, from the early-to-mid 1990s until the present day, which I will refer to as the “Public History Era” of tourism.

The first of these three periods of tourism began in 1954 with the founding of the China International Travel Service (CITS), the first travel organization to manage foreign guests in the People’s Republic.¹⁴⁹ As Xuewen Zhang notes, it was founded as a political organization to receive governmental delegations, often at the service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was definitively not an institution established for drawing tourist dollars, as costs for travel, food, accommodation, and transport were covered by CITS, not the visitor. At first, CITS only brought in visitors in substantial number from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, but after the Sino-Soviet split in 1960, CITS’ draw of tourists began to include both official and private visitors from Japan and Western Europe, but after the Sino-Soviet split in 1960, CITS’ draw of tourists began to include both official and private visitors from Japan and Western Europe concurrently with PRC efforts to improve relations with

¹⁴⁸ “Museumification of China,” moderated by Jeffrey Johnson in The Museum Boom in China (conference panel, The Museum Boom in China, New York, October 14, 2016). In this conference panel at Columbia University, scholars discussed the rise of museums in China in the context of rapid urbanization.
these non-Soviet states. This effort was largely paused during the Cultural Revolution, and tourism in turn declined rapidly and dramatically, with CITS essentially mothballed.\footnote{Ibid., 4-7.}

By 1978, however, Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms and the normalization of relations with the United States shortly thereafter resulted in a massive expansion of tourism. The government recognized tourism as an official industry and emphasized the importance of tourism not merely to establish political relations, but also to promote economic growth. This resulted in a reorganization of administrative institutions, and—by 1985—in the official approval of privately owned travel agencies under the guidance of the newly created China National Tourism Administration (CNTA).\footnote{Ibid., 8-10.} From 1985 to 1988, the combined efforts of CITS and CNTA-affiliated private travel agencies virtually doubled the number of inbound international tourists to Mainland China, with a similar increase in foreign tourist revenue. This trend was expected to continue, but the June 4th Incident in Tiananmen Square resulted in a dramatic decline in international tourism—an over 29 percent decrease in foreign tourists—from which Chinese tourism did not recover for nearly four years.\footnote{“Annual Visitor Arrivals 1978-2015,” \textit{The Yearbook of China Tourism Statistics 2016} (Beijing: National Tourism Administration of the People’s Republic of China, 2016), 12-13.}

With this dramatic decline in international tourism came a decline in the need for tour guides to lead foreign tours. But after the Chinese government reestablished order and reaffirmed its relationships with foreign—at this point primarily Western—powers, tourism once again became a prominent force in the Chinese economy. The “Public History Era” of tourism saw the exponential expansion of tourism that had seemed unstoppable during the late 1980s: the annual number of foreign tourists more than tripled between 1994 and 2011.\footnote{Ibid. During this period, there was a brief decline in tourism between 2002 and 2003. According to one tour agency director, the SARS outbreak from late 2002 to early 2003 had a noticeable impact on foreigners booking travel to China; rapid growth did not resume until 2004. 2011 marks the high-point in Chinese foreign visitors as of the completion of this chapter: China saw just over 135.4 million foreign visitors (including repeat visits by individuals), with an average between 2012 and 2015 of approximately 130.9 million visitors per year.} It was in this environment that the job of tour guide became a much-sought-after career for both the status it held and the income it brought with it. The job transformed over the course of the late 1990s and the early 21\textsuperscript{st} century, but throughout this era of tourism, the tour guide remained a central feature of public history for both foreign and domestic tourists, one rooted in local history and guided by provincial branches of the CNTA.
Becoming a Tour Guide

Once tourism began to recover from its post-1989 decline, the high status of the tour guide that had been established in the previous two eras of tourism drew considerable attention from those who sought esteemed careers and pay significantly above the average income of a typical urban worker. Together, status and pay drew applicants from diverse educational and occupational backgrounds into the program established to train and license tour guides. By examining why tour guides chose their occupation and how they were trained to work with domestic and foreign tourists, we can identify some of the ways in which the individual’s own ambitions and background affect their place in transmitting a public historical narrative.

There are major three groups of professionals involved in the guiding of tourists which I will discuss throughout this chapter. The first group I discuss is the “tour guide,” which refers to a trained and licensed professional employed by a travel agency or working free-lance for various travel agencies. The second group is the “museum interpreter,” which refers to a salaried professional whose responsibilities are to a single museum or historical site through which they are directly employed. The third group is the “museum docent,” who acts as a volunteer within a single museum or historical site—much like the museum interpreter—but receives no pay. Instead, museum docents, often university students, receive university credit or internship-style training for their services at the museum. The primary difference between tour guides and museum interpreters and docents is institutional: tour guides are employed outside of museums and historical sites and thus give tours of multiple institutions with which they have no official affiliation. Museum interpreters and docents, on the other hand, are employed by one museum or historical site, and give tours as direct affiliates of the institution. When agency-guided tour groups, both foreign and domestic, visit a museum with a tour guide, they rely almost exclusively on their tour guide to lead them through the museum, not a museum interpreter or docent. Museum interpreters and docents are thus on-hand staff who typically assist individual visitors or small family groups who wish to have some guidance through a large museum or historical site, but have no tour guide of their own.

154 There are a few individual tour guides who provide services directly to tourists without being tied to a travel agency, but they represent a small minority of tour guides and tourists guided: most tour guiding is done in group form, mediated by a travel agency.
155 Interview 2. Although it is rarely the case that tour groups request an interpreter or docent when they are already led by a tour guide, the National Museum of China in Beijing is the sole exception: outside tour guides are not allowed to lead tours through the National Museum, so tour groups must rely on a paid interpreter of the museum.
There was no singular or universal motivation to becoming a tour guide in this period, but a few commonalities did exist, which continue to draw guides and interpreters into service. The first and most important of these, which was particularly pertinent in the 1990s during the recovery period and continues to draw guides today, was the pay accorded to the tour guide. One tour guide from Xi’an that I interviewed became a guide in 1996 and chose to do so explicitly for financial reasons: he held a bachelor’s degree in Botany and was working as a botanical gardener but found that he would make over ten times as much money as a tour guide—and in particular, as a foreign-language tour guide. He found himself making nearly ¥100,000 per year through wages and tips at a time when the average annual wage nationwide was just under ¥6,000. Despite the recent stagnation in his income, even today, he makes about twice the average income of a wage-earner in Shaanxi Province, which is reason enough to draw one to the profession. For him, the status of the job also drew his attention: one of the roles of the English-speaking tour guide that began in the Maoist Era and continued through the Market Era into the early 2000s was the notion of serving as a “civilian diplomat.” As a civilian diplomat, a trained tour guide interacting with foreigners was expected to support state and Party policy and speak on behalf of the government and would therefore be accorded the status of a government employee, which brought with it job security and considerably high pay at a time when typical labor wages could not always meet rising living standards. After the Maoist and Market eras of tourism, the status of “civilian diplomat” remained, but increasing privatization and rising wages nationally meant that money would eventually overshadow status as the core motivation for becoming a tour guide.

To others, becoming a tour guide was just as much about pay as it was about job experience. One interviewee worked as a tour guide from 1998 to 2000 while completing her master’s degree in English, which she now teaches at the university level. When asked why she became a tour guide, she said matter-of-factly: “a job is a job.” She said working as a tour guide for English-language tours gave her a decent income while in school and additionally gave her the opportunity to practice speaking English with native English speakers, an opportunity

---

156 Interview 4.
158 Interview 4.
159 Interview 3.
that was rare in the late 1990s. Another former tour guide who now directs tours for a privately owned travel agency also embraced the opportunity to hone her English skills with face-to-face interactions. She now organizes and manages tours for international tourists primarily from English-speaking countries. This emphasis on communication and language practice as a tour guide is evident today among college-aged museum docents and interpreters as well. A young museum interpreter that I interviewed was completing a master’s degree in English while working at Shaanxi Provincial Museum as a paid museum interpreter, much like the English instructor who led tours during her own studies. While most of the interpreter’s tours were conducted in Chinese, she looked forward to the occasional English-language tours that she could provide to practice speaking English with native speakers. One of her docent colleagues, on the other hand, was studying Science and Technology as an undergraduate, but his personal interest in history prompted him to become a volunteer docent in the museum, which allowed him to learn more about Chinese history and communicate his love for history to visiting domestic tourists.

What is notable about each of these cases is that none of the tour guides, museum interpreters, or museum docents I interviewed had a background in history beyond their secondary education. Most of their historical knowledge beyond the high-school level was obtained on the job via training and self-directed education. For some museum interpreters and docents, it is not uncommon to be a university student studying archaeology or history, but it is not a requirement for their work, and for tour guides, having a background in history is exceedingly rare. The guide-turned-director noted that the tour guides who work for her travel agency relied on self-directed education in order to improve their knowledge of history. The only requirement for tour guides in the 1990s was knowledge of a foreign language in order to provide tours to foreign-language tour groups. In 2000, there was still a requirement for a bachelor’s degree in whichever foreign language that tour guide planned to work, but that requirement no longer exists under the newly structured tourism education programs that are

---

160 Ibid.
161 Interview 5.
162 Interview 2.
163 Interview 1.
164 Interview 2.
165 Interview 5.
operated in conjunction with provincial branches of the CNTA. As a result, only 18.9 percent of new foreign language tour guides now have a degree in foreign language. Yet there are still no educational requirements in history for either tour guides or museum interpreters and docents, despite the public historical nature of their work.

The process for hiring and tour guide licensure in the mid-1990s was incredibly rigorous, and for foreign-language tour guides it involved an oral second-language examination, a written second-language examination, an examination on tourism guidelines and regulations, and an examination on knowledge of local, regional, and national historical sites and destinations. These examinations were not easy. One guide recalls that when he was licensed, of the approximately 35 applicants for licensure, only he and one other applicant successfully passed the examinations. In recent years, however, the process has been streamlined, and licensure can occur as part of a vocational training program in a public or private university that operates a tourism school specifically designed for tourism management and tour guide training. This training program additionally covers training on guidelines and regulations of the tourism industry; the examination on these policies no longer requires self-directed study as was the case for earlier tour guides. What is now required, however, is attendance at one of the recently created tourism training schools operated by the CNTA. This involves paying an enrolment and training fee on top of the licensure fee, which was previously the only fee involved in becoming a tour guide. In short, there is less self-direction required to become a tour guide today, but in order to join the field, a guide-in-training has to pay to play.

Reading the Script

For volunteer museum docents and paid museum interpreters, the process of hiring and training is a largely internal one but remains a rigorous process that reflects the earlier self-directed requirements of becoming a tour guide. This process involves reliance on an object known as the guidebook, colloquially referred to as “the script.” These scripts are ubiquitous at government-owned and operated museums and historical sites, and they deserve further

---

166 Ibid.
168 Interview 3.
169 Interview 4.
170 Interview 5.
171 Interview 4.
examination to understand the official public historical narrative that museums and historical sites in China attempt to present to their foreign and domestic publics.

The script is a physical object that is distributed to both volunteer docents and paid interpreters working within the museum when they begin the training process. Scripts typically contain information about each exhibit in the museum as well as anecdotes about many specific objects contained within those exhibits. They are produced in-house by a museum historian and museum administrators and are updated almost every year to include new objects on display, changes in exhibit composition, inclusions based on frequently asked questions by visitors, or any other modifications deemed essential for the work of museum docents and museum interpreters. The objects that the museum administration considers to have the greatest historical or cultural significance often have extensive descriptions and information concerning their history. For these objects, the script usually includes stories or anecdotes related to the objects’ histories, uses, or even its archaeological discovery.

At Shaanxi Provincial Museum, before volunteer museum docents are allowed to lead tours on the floor, they must memorize the scripts provided to them in their training sessions and then perform mock tours for a supervisor. To become a paid museum interpreter, however, there is a multiple-level interview process in which the interviewer judges speaking ability, gestures, and appearance; in 2013, of the 400-500 applicants to Shaanxi Provincial Museum for paid positions, only about 60 made it through the initial interview process. For those who make it through interviews, there is then a three-month training period where trainees shadow paid interpreters in order to develop their communication skills and memorize the script verbatim. At the end of this three-month period, the interpreter-in-training must pass three consecutive on-the-floor examinations by a supervisor before leading museum guests on guided tours. As museums like the Shaanxi Provincial Museum are state-owned and operated enterprises and hold

---

172 See Appendix I, Figure 10.
173 Interviews 1 and 2. When I asked who produced the scripts in the museum, I received two different answers. One docent stated that the script was produced by 宣传部, or the Department of Education and Dissemination (colloquially in English, the Propaganda Department), while another speculated that the newly created Public Education Department had taken over the activities of publication. The scripts themselves contain no publication information.
174 Interview 1.
175 Interview 2.
176 Interview 1.
177 Interview 2.
178 Ibid.
some of the most valuable and culturally significant objects of their given region of focus, the demands to historical narrative adherence are higher than that of the private tour guide, and there is greater supervision over the training and education process, even with the self-directed requirements to memorize the script.

For the museum docent and interpreter alike, the script is central to their work both as a useful source of information to transmit to visitors and a tool with which the museum can maintain some uniformity over the narrative presented to those visitors. When visiting a large museum like Shaanxi Provincial Museum, it is not uncommon to see college-aged students walking around the museum and delivering a tour with the script in hand, to no one but an imagined group of invisible visitors. The script as an object is highly visible, but access to the script for anyone outside of the museum institution is restricted, despite—or perhaps because of—its official capacity to generate public historical narratives in the hands of a trained docent or paid museum interpreter.179 While the contents of the script can only be gleaned by listening to tours, it is certain that that script receives heavy use within the museum itself through the museum docent and museum interpreter.

Tour Guides and the Construction of a Public Historical Narrative

The tour guide, who has no affiliation with a specific museum or historical site, however, has a remarkably different relationship with the script. Similar scripted guidebooks are distributed by regional bureaus of tourism to tour guides when they are licensed which provide condensed scripts from various historical sites and museums in the region in which they received licensure. These guidebooks are updated annually and distributed again to tour guides each year during their re-licensure seminar. However, there are different expectations placed on the tour guide than the museum interpreter that stem largely from the nature of tour guiding versus museum interpretation, which gives the tour guide far more agency in producing narratives than museum interpreters or docents.

179 Only momentarily was I granted permission to view a copy of a full guidebook. During my second day interviewing one museum interpreter, I asked if I might be able to take a copy of the script to read overnight and return the following day, but the interpreter said I “had better not.” After spending multiple days working with two particular museum docents both in and out of the museum, as well as sharing dinner with them on multiple occasions, they suggested they might send a copy to me via email, but they were hesitant given the perceived sensitivity of the document, and they decided not to pass it along. I currently have access to a one-exhibit section of one script from 2011, in hard-copy.
As a government representative, the museum docent or museum interpreter is expected to be knowledgeable about the contents of the entire museum and able to answer most questions that visitors to the museum might reasonably ask. As mentioned earlier, museum interpreters and docents are employees of a single institution, so knowledgeability about their institution of employment and its contents is vital to their work. A tour guide, on the other hand, is expected not only to be generally knowledgeable about each museum or historical site on a tour, but additionally to be entertaining, helpful, and keep tourists on schedule for full-day or multiple-day tours. So while the script exists as educational material for the tour guide, it is less central to their work than the museum interpreter or docent, and in practice is tweaked, re-narrated, or overlooked all together in the pursuit of an engaging, customer-driven public historical narrative.

When asked about the role of the script in their work, tour guides responses varied widely on the degree to which they rely on scripted guidebooks for their tours. For one former guide, guiding was just a job to get through her master’s degree, so she relied fairly heavily on the script, as it provided all the information she needed to run a functional tour. For the full-time guide, who has worked over 20 years as a tour guide, he began by using the script, but found that his tours were boring for the tourists. Over time, he included more of his personal experiences at historical sites, read other books on Chinese history and his most-visited historical sites, and relied on the models of experienced colleagues to make his tours more appealing. He claimed that the English guide books use too formal of language and ineffective translations that are confusing to English-speaking tourists, so the guides who rely heavily on the guidebooks are received poorly by their tourists. Another former guide, on the other hand, proudly stated that she never used the scripts provided for tour guides. Instead, she relied on her life experience, knowledge of history from her secondary education, and historical site signage and information to build her tour narratives.

Curiously, the first former tour guide I interviewed noted that some of her coworkers who refused to use guidebooks actually fabricated stories about historical sites and museum objects with no grounding in historical fact, but that foreign tourists rarely had the knowledge necessary to recognize such fabrication. Instead, it often takes well-educated visitors to recognize such

---

180 Interview 3.
181 Interview 4.
182 Interview 6.
183 Interview 3.
fabrications. For example, one of my Chinese contacts in Xi’an mentioned that on a tour she once took in Shaanxi Provincial Museum, the docent explained to her and her family that the practice of using a *yasheng* coin was an ancient game, rather than a religious or superstitious ritual, which she knew beforehand. While this practice of fabrication is officially forbidden for museum docents and interpreters according to the 2001 revised Chinese Cultural Relics, Museum Workers’ Professional Ethics Code (中国文物、博物馆工作者职业道德准则) and presumably a similar code exists for tour guides, the tour guides I interviewed noted that some colleagues continue to fabricate stories of provenance and historical importance for objects or sites, or rely on legends that have little basis in historical fact. The museum has far greater control over their own employees in this regard, but tour guides are essentially free to enter museums and historical sites once their group has booked entry and have virtually no oversight once they are leading tours on their own. Despite this, all of the guides I interviewed suggested that they themselves attempt to be as factual as possible for the sake of their tour groups’ knowledge. Notable across the board in interviews was the consensus that reliance on the guidebooks was the sign of a new, inexperienced, unconfident, or boring tour guide: they each agreed that guides who rely heavily on scripts are likely to receive worse feedback from their tour groups than guides who do not. Charismatic guides who personalized their tours, on the other hand, were perceived as the most successful at their work and most engaging in their presentation of narratives to tourists.

In this process, each tour guide has significant linguistic space in which to construct a narrative in order to meet their job expectations. Without frequent supervision or the requirement to memorize their scripts, tour guides are free to narrate history and interpret sites and objects as they see fit. While they are officially expected to adhere to script materials, there is considerable space in which guides can change their narrative based on their audience, which changes every time they give a tour. Thus, their public historical narrative retains a situational mutability that involves the selection of information and pieces of narrative to appeal directly to a given audience. For this, there is a direct economic incentive to make a tour engaging, which comes via tipping. The act of tipping, which began with privatization in 1985, involves tips from both individual tourists and Western travel agencies themselves—in both cases primarily from
the United States—who would tip tour guides, against industry regulations, for excellent service. As Xuewen Zhang notes, tourists often simply “[give] tips to the guides they liked.”

In order to receive good tips and get repeat business from travel agencies, then, the tour guide must provide an enjoyable tour experience. In practice, this usually involves expertise in guiding and “reading” the audience. As mentioned earlier, both former and current guides considered themselves and their colleagues not particularly engaging early on primarily because they relied heavily on scripted materials. In both cases, they believed they succeeded in their field because their tours were interesting, and because they were engaging tour leaders who did not recite formal, dull scripts verbatim. The current guide noted that telling funny or light-hearted stories or anecdotes keeps tourists engaged, and he also asserted that maintaining a good relationship with the tourists is important, which involves knowing when they are losing interest, or knowing if the group likes certain aspects of history more than others. He also noted that the ability to speak English fluently with English-speaking tour groups was not the most important aspect of the job, either. One of his former colleagues spoke poor English, but was accommodating and kind, so his tours were well received by foreign tourists—just the sort of tour that yields a large tip. One former guide claimed that her self-confidence and ability to read her groups allowed her to be an effective guide: knowing the background, occupation, and education of her tour group members meant she could tune her narratives to their specific interests and provide an enjoyable experience, even without having ever cracked open the official guidebook scripts. To the guide, reciting the script verbatim is usually detrimental to tourist engagement: what is most essential is crafting a narrative that effectively engages tourists from different backgrounds, and that means changing emphasis or altering content discussed from group to group to ensure an enjoyable tour.

For the docent or on-site museum interpreter at state-operated institutions, there is significantly less situational mutability afforded to them, as their subject area is restricted to a single museum’s collections, and their training process is supervised directly by superiors. However, museum interpretation sessions are under significant time constraint, typically lasting

---

184 Zhang, *China International Travel Service*, 51. Tipping remains a common practice among tour guides today, despite the official policies opposed to the practice. Just as there is no supervisor present at a tour to ensure that guides are adhering to guidebooks, there is similarly no supervisor present to ensure they receive no tips.

185 Interview 4.

186 Interview 6. Yang Hongying and Chen Hui similarly note the importance of tuning “tour guide interpretation” to the specifics of a tour group in terms of age, gender, education, religion, and occupation in order to foster appreciation for cultural sites amongst the tour group in “Analysis of Tour Guide Interpretation in China.”
approximately two hours, which is barely enough time to cover a single exhibit in full detail given the script length. Full museum scripts contain hundreds of pages of information and would be difficult to cover in the course of a week, let alone an afternoon. Thus, museum guides still have agency in selection: by choosing which objects museum interpreters explain to their guests, they can select those narrative elements they believe will be best suited to a particular tour group, which parallels the tour guide’s constructive act of narration. The museum interpreter said a good interpreter will listen to questions of their groups, especially about specific objects, and discuss those objects and other objects like them in order to provide a quality tour. Additionally, she noted that a good interpreter will be able to read her audience based on their background, gender, age, place of origin, etc. in order to estimate what sorts of exhibits and objects will be most interesting to that particular group. There are only a few objects that are required for interpretation which are noted by level of cultural importance in the script, so ultimately, the duty of the museum interpreter is to explain what the tourists want to know more about, not provide a consistent, uniform narrative from tour to tour. It is within this selective space that the agency of the museum interpreter, like the tour guide, is apparent.

Even so, museum interpreters are only serving a small portion of the public entering a large museum. Organized tour groups with a tour guide at the head typically do not use a museum docent or interpreter, and instead rely on their tour guide, who does not have supervision by the museum institution itself, and given the nature of their job, regularly goes off script. Despite working within museums that produce an official public historical narrative and visiting historical sites that have their own as well, there is little incentive for tour guides to present that narrative to their tour groups. In many cases, tour guides are better rewarded for presenting their own versions of official historical narrative. Appealing to the tourist is lucrative, but it necessitates going off script.

Tour Packages and the Narrativity of Inclusion/Exclusion

Beyond the acts of inclusion and exclusion, of using the script or ignoring it, the destinations visited in a tour package play a role in determining the historical narratives and images tourists receive of a particular place. In the case of Xi’an, a city which has significantly

---

187 Interview 2. The exhibit script in my possession covers a single exhibit in the National Museum in Beijing and spans over 20 pages discussing premodern Buddhist statuary.
188 Ibid.
less familiarity by foreign tourists as it does by domestic tourists, the actual destinations visited by foreign and domestic tour groups are quite different. There are a few places that all tour groups visit even on two-day stints in the city: according to the travel director and guides I interviewed, the Terracotta Army, the City Wall, the Giant Wild Goose Pagoda, the Bell Tower, Drum Tower, the Muslim Cultural Street, the Forest of Stone Steles, and the Shaanxi Provincial Museum are visited by foreign and domestic tour groups alike.¹⁸⁹ For foreign tourists, these sites paint a broad picture of Xi’an as a former capital, with a history stretching from the first emperor and China’s early technological prowess, to China’s multi-ethnic nature and religious diversity, to the architectural achievements and artwork in the early modern era. As many tour groups from the West are only visiting Xi’an as one stop in a multi-stage tour across China, they typically stay in Xi’an for two or three days, then move on to another province or back to the coastal cities where they likely began the tour.

Domestic tour groups, however, typically spend much more time in a much more limited geographic area, taking either regional tours or city and province-specific tours. It is quite common for an American visiting China to take a four or five city trek around the country, stopping in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Xi’an, and Beijing, but an American traveling domestically will likely not visit Miami, Washington DC, New York City, and Chicago all in the same trip. Domestic trips tend to be cheaper and more frequent than international ones, so travel plans vary accordingly. In the Chinese case, a Chinese tour group in Xi’an will ordinarily tour Xi’an and Shaanxi in much greater depth and for two or three times as long as a foreign tourist for whom Shaanxi Province is but one stop in a longer list: to the domestic tourist, a trip to Shaanxi is often a trip only to Shaanxi, just as an American’s trip to Washington DC, for comparison’s sake, is often a trip only to Washington DC. As such, domestic tourists to Xi’an typically visit not only all of the same major sites as a foreign tour group, but additionally visit those sites which receive few foreign visitors, including historical theme parks such as Tang Paradise and Qujiang Cold Cave Heritage Park, important religious pilgrimage sites including Mount Hua and Famen Temple, and historical sites more famous to Chinese citizens such as Qianling Mausoleum, the Tang West Market, or Huaqing Hot Springs Palace. Thus, to the domestic tourist, Xi’an-based tour guides can share far more of Xi’an’s long history with their visitors, showing them many Han and Tang Dynasty sites that foreign visitors would never encounter, giving them a much

¹⁸⁹ Interview 5.
more comprehensive narrative of Xi’an’s importance in Chinese history or reframing the history of the city they already know.

Still, in both cases, the provincially organized nature of tourism and public history mean that tours through Xi’an are not just about China’s history but very much about the historical importance and culture of Xi’an and Shaanxi Province in particular. The guidebook scripts distributed to tour guides—which they can use or ignore at their own discretion—are produced by the provincial tourism bureau, and the guides are trained not only in general tour guide practices but to focus specifically on sites within their own region of Shaanxi Province and the city of Xi’an. Domestic tour groups typically retain the same guide throughout their journey in the city if it is a one-city or one-region tour. Foreign tour groups, on the other hand, typically have multiple tour guides, one for each city or region they visit on their tour. This means that a tour guide trained in Shaanxi Province devotes most of their guiding to expertise on the province and the city, allowing their narratives to focus specifically on their home city or province. To the domestic and foreign tourist alike, a tour guide is a native educator about all things Shaanxi Province and Xi’an. The extent to which they then go into detail beyond Xi’an and Shaanxi depends upon the guide, the tour, and the tour group.

**Conclusion: Reading the Museum and Listening to the Guide**

The status of the job of tour guide has declined over the course of the Public History Era, and income has not increased at nearly the same rate as careers in other sectors of the Chinese economy. This is due in part to the more relaxed requirements for becoming a tour guide and the increasing privatization of the tourism industry: no longer are tour guides “civilian diplomats,” and no longer do they have the same rigorous examination processes to enter the field. Yet because of this, the tour guide has not only maintained but expanded the ability to craft a public historical narrative as they see best fit to satisfy their particular tour group; there are more guides working, more tour groups visiting, and fewer restrictions on what guides can and cannot do or say. When the tour guide is a tourist’s primary means of learning the history of a particular historical site, an object in a museum, or even an entire city and province, the narratives that the tour guide creates serve as a vital component of public history transmission that goes beyond the script and the museum as texts and ultimately relies upon the agency of the guide. Even if the intention of the script is uniformity, in practice the result is the production of thousands of
different narratives of history that change depending upon the tour guide, their direction of material towards the specifics of a tour group, and their willingness to select, embellish, or even fabricate anecdotes and narratives outright.

To “read” a museum as a text makes sense in those contexts in which the museum is both small enough for the visitor to view in its entirety within the course of a few hours and accessible enough to be physically read by the visitor in a language they understand. In fact, small museums who cannot afford on-site guides offer no alternative. However, as is largely the case in China, we must look beyond a textual reading to understand the actual public historical narratives being generated, as attendance at many museums and historical sites is driven by tour groups that spend only an hour or two at a site and are guided throughout by their tour guide. As tantalizing as it may be to use the literal, physical public historical narrative which comes in the form of a script, it is important that we recognize its inaccessibility by the visitor—and in many cases, even the public history scholar—and use it instead as a pivot from which to ground our study, rather than the focus of the study itself. What is most essential to understanding public historical narratives is a study of the primary producers of narrative. In Xi’an, those oft-overlooked contributors engaged in the act of producing narratives are the tour guides.

Epilogue: The New Public History Professional

One of the greatest benefits—and occasionally frustrations—to researching a history up to the present moment is the ability to incorporate first-hand knowledge of the day to day activities of people—in this case, of tour guides and museum employees. On the one hand, scholarship is being published every month, and incorporating the latest research can be a daunting challenge. On the other hand, the historian can quite literally ask questions to a person that a document itself can never answer. The obvious downside among the many issues inherent in oral history, however, is the capacity, or lack thereof, to contextualize and analyze ongoing transformations as they occur, and thus I have resorted to an epilogue for my third chapter to discuss a recent transformation in Chinese museum work. Indeed, only a few years ago, a new museum occupation appeared on the scene in Beijing that shares some striking similarities to both the re-emergent tour guide of the “Public History Era” and the present-day museum interpreter, one who navigates both public historical narratives and the spaces they inhabit in new and distinctive ways. This occupation is that of the public educator, which I will briefly
outline below in the hope that future researchers can take advantage of this preliminary glimpse of a recent way that Chinese museum materials are being interpreted for a new public.

The public educator operates under the newly created Public Education Department established first in 2011 at the National Museum of China in Beijing. The department and role has since expanded to multiple provincial and regional museums across China, including Shaanxi Provincial Museum. The public educator’s primary audience is not international or even interregional tourists as is usually the case with the museum docent and museum interpreter, but rather local public school children, and as such faces specific requirements within the museum that guides and interpreters do not face. The public educator combines exhibit tours with classroom activities to create a curriculum-supplementing lesson plan that ties directly into primary school history education. The position combines Western methods of “hands-on” learning and critical thinking adapted from German museums for Chinese students in order to provide a complement to textbook learning in school. The “public educator” is a relatively new phenomenon in China and coincides with the increasing internationalization of museums and museum exhibitions via an explicitly public historical focus. In fact, the department’s very existence reflects an increasingly international focus of the museum as an institution serving a public beyond the original purviews of the museum’s creation. In this fashion, the Public Education Department represents yet another adoption of Western public historical practices to suit Chinese needs, drawing Chinese museums even closer to our Western definition of “public history.”

As noted earlier, the Public Education Department was established primarily for educational activities for children via school groups and families. The Department has three main audiences for educational activities: young children, school-aged children, and families with children. Their primary focus is summer education for school-aged children that supplements school curricula and complements history education as taught in the classroom, while their “Sunshine Kids” program focuses on families who bring their children to the museum without the participation of the school. Family-oriented programs typically take place on weekends but occasionally take place during weekdays as well, and in the winter, the

---

190 Interview 7.
191 Ibid.
192 Ibid.
Department offers a similar, but abridged, version of the summer education program.\textsuperscript{193} The programs combine interactive classrooms and “hands on” learning experiences that encourage students to engage with objects in the galleries. The public educator typically hosts a classroom session about a specific topic, takes the students into the gallery to examine the objects which relate to the lesson, and then students do activities meant to spur reflection upon the gallery visit, followed by an artwork project for creative exercise of their newly acquired knowledge of Chinese art and history. Throughout each session, there is a strong emphasis on having children ask and answer one another’s questions to teach group interaction and critical reasoning skills.\textsuperscript{194}

Much like conservation efforts discussed in Chapter 1, these programs have immediate Western precedents. The specific program structures at the National Museum in Beijing were based on a model from Goethe University in Frankfurt. However, as my interviewee noted, these Western methods of public education are applied not only to achieve Western goals of education, but additionally to meet Chinese needs. In order to address issues that arose with the one-child policy, the head of the Public Education Department sought to use Western methods to help teach the “little emperors” behavioral lessons in manners, respect, interpersonal communication, and helping others. The programs thus serve as one place to provide an environment where customs and etiquette can be taught to children at an early age. Perhaps, then, Tony Bennett’s museum as a space in which to produce good citizens is taking off in China; if so, what better candidates for good, orderly citizens than the new generation?

On top of addressing social issues, the department head hopes to make up for some deficiencies in the public education system by providing a setting in which students are encouraged to ask questions and explore learning on their own outside of the classroom and beyond rote memorization of materials. For example, public educators openly discuss with the children some historical debates and interpretations of artifacts that do not have a clear consensus, and the validity of all reasoned points of view is emphasized in order to encourage critical thinking.\textsuperscript{195} Thus, the role of the public educator is not to lecture children about a specific topic in history or art history—which they already receive at school—but rather to facilitate the acquisition of similar knowledge through the process of questioning, dialogue, and active intellectual engagement.

\textsuperscript{193} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{195} Ibid.
While the public educator does not provide tours as traditionally undertaken by the tour guide, there are striking similarities between the tour guide and museum interpreter position and the newly developed public educator role. Like the hiring process for working at the Shaanxi Provincial Museum, so too is there a rigorous three-tier interview process for public educators at the National Museum. Public educators are required to have a Master’s degree, but their background need not be in history or art history, as is the case with my interviewee at the National Museum and a few of her coworkers. Their learning, like that of the museum docents, museum interpreters, and tour guides, is largely self-directed and done at the library in free time. However, there is more on-site training than for tour guides, including in child psychology, which two members of the Public Education Department at the National Museum studied in their graduate education. Some of my interviewee’s colleagues were trained formally in history, but she wishes first and foremost that the department would provide more training in history to make up for gaps in her knowledge on the subject. In her lessons, too, she is required to adhere factually to the script materials of the National Museum, and as a government employee must be aware of sensitive topics, usually political, in her choices for lesson plans.

Despite these many similarities, what the public educator largely lacks that the tour guide often develops is the ability to construct a situationally mutable narrative. In a classroom setting, there is a clearly defined lesson plan which is instructed to each group of students that comes through the classroom, and while each group of students will have different questions and different responses to the material, the material presented in the first place and the goals of the class session are clearly defined and approved by a supervisor. Lessons must be outlined explicitly with a goal in mind, and a departmental section leader will review the plan before it is brought in for a department meeting where the various proposed lessons are discussed and reviewed. The Department head will then attend each new lesson on its first run to provide feedback to the public educator after the lesson plan has been reviewed. While the feedback from the department head and section supervisor is not required to be included in future

196 The National Museum of China has a unique policy regarding tour guides: no outside guides are allowed to lead tour groups through the Museum; all tours must be led by an on-staff museum interpreter or employee, but this is an exception to the norm. Most tour groups with a guide rely on their guide in museums, and not on museum staff.
197 Interview 7. The Public Education Department member noted that her Master’s degree in Journalism, by its nature, translates fairly readily to her work at the National Museum, mentioning that Journalism is itself “a type of public education.”
198 Ibid.
199 Ibid.
classroom sessions, and is often about anticipated questions from children, these additional levels of supervision do not exist in the day-to-day work of the tour guide or even the museum docent or interpreter after their initial training sessions. There is a certain freedom in the tour guide’s ability—and even the museum interpreter’s ability—to tune their presentation to audiences and circumstances that an in-museum educator lacks due to their audience and the expectations of their work.

Given their responsibility to supplement school history curricula, stricter standards are expected: the public educator in this instance is providing an officially sanctioned education to Chinese primary school students, whereas the tour guide is providing an elective service to foreign and domestic tourists whose primary goal for travel is typically leisure. Furthermore, the primary incentive for the public education program at the National Museum is to educate Chinese students in history and art history within the museum, whereas the primary incentive for tourism is economic: namely, to attract new and return tourists and their money. Concerns over adherence to a set of historical narratives come second to successful operations of tours: both tips and feedback from partner agencies and tourists themselves are essential to income and further career prospects for tour guides. Providing an enjoyable experience that creates a happy, tipping, possibly even repeat customer, in many cases supersedes—and as noted earlier, even conflicts with—a verbatim recitation of script materials and historical narrative. The public educator, then, is a more successful exercise in uniformity: every student participating in a summer program at the museum will theoretically receive a similar learning experience and be exposed to the same body of knowledge. Perhaps, then, the Public Education Department will finally help make possible the museum ideal of shaping citizens by serving as a companion and counterpart to China’s school system. The average tourist visitor to the museum, however, has a much different experience within the same physical space.
Concluding Remarks

It seems fairly clear to me that while museums and historical sites in China are certainly arenas in which emerging neoliberal narratives are disseminated to the masses of both domestic and foreign visitors, that the process by which those narratives are generated and disseminated is far more complex than merely reading museums as texts can allow. Of course, public historical knowledge in China is contained within certain guidelines of historical site construction, museum narrative production, and tour guiding, but in practice there is far more diversity between places, agency by local forces, and distance from official protocol than has been previously understood. Only with cases of serious destruction or controversy, like the Great Wall “repair” in Liaoning Province discussed in Chapter 1, do we see direct action to bring local and regional public historical forces back into line with national protocol. Otherwise, it is a fairly hands-off system: as long as the provincial and municipal bureaus of tourism, cultural heritage, development, and so forth are not stirring the pot too much, they often have the final say in the production of spaces and narratives of public history.

Given the importance of those spaces to driving the tourist economy, the public bureaus and private investors involved certainly have cause to transform those spaces and the narratives therein into their own, making public history not just a Chinese history, but a regional and local one as well. Were they to only focus on Chinese history at large, what is to stop tourists from visiting Zhengzhou, Nanjing, or Chengdu to learn that same history? The goal of these provincial bureaus—especially the bureau of tourism—is to draw tourists to Xi’an and Shaanxi Province and ensure that visitors are staying longer, spending more, and having an experience good enough to warrant a return trip in the future. As such, public history in Xi’an has become a branding campaign for the city and province, as evident by one of the more ubiquitous guide books found at historical sites and museums across the city. *Xi’an: One of the Four Ancient Capitals in the World* is titled as such not to suggest that Xi’an is important only to China, but to proclaim that it stands alongside famed cities such as ancient Rome in global historical significance. Published by the Shaanxi Tourism Press, the glowing introduction to the city ends touting Xi’an’s growing reputation: “Xi’an, with its exceptional advantages of tourism resources, is attracting more and more tourists from both home and abroad to come. With the development
of its travel industry, Xi’an is sure to cause more and more attention of the whole world.” Xi’an’s most vital “tourism resource” is its public historical space, and that space is quickly becoming essential to the city’s brand.

It is virtually impossible to visit Xi’an without seeing its history in some form or another. Walking or taking a taxi through the heart of the city will inevitably mean passing through one of the Ming-era city wall gatehouses, circling the Bell Tower, or passing one of the famed Buddhist temples and their pagodas. Taking public transit is yet another reminder: standard-issue transportation cards contain images of important sites and artifacts from Xi’an, including the Terracotta Army, the Giant Wild Goose Pagoda, the Bell Tower, and more. Using that card to enter the various stations of the metro is a further glimpse of local history. One metro station contains a mural of qinqiang opera performers, a theatrical form native to Shaanxi Province. The metro station near the Giant Wild Goose Pagoda contains a mural of the famed monk Xuanzang, who traveled to India to bring back Buddhist scripture, for whom the pagoda was built. The Banpo metro station is covered in both artistic and architectural forms meant to evoke the Neolithic housing structures and pottery designs found at the Banpo site just a short walk from the entrance. There are so many historical sites and places of importance to the city that most metro stations have some historical theme, ranging from imagery of the Silk Road to Tang-era polo players, depending upon their physical location in the city. To keep history in view, too, there are municipal regulations requiring all buildings lining the City Wall to retain a height beneath that of the wall’s and to be constructed or maintained in architecture befitting the Ming period. So much of what a visitor or citizen sees in Xi’an is public history in one form or another: understanding how this history and the spaces it occupies are produced, then, is essential to knowing the manner in which the public encounters the city’s past.

The term “public history” is fairly young in relation to Chinese public historical institutions: the concept of public history as a joint field of study and a profession is in its early stages, but there is much promise to its continued study and development, both professionally and academically. The first public history training program in China was held in 2014, organized by Chinese public history scholar Na Li and the newly created Center for Public

---

200 Su, Xi’an, 6.
201 See Appendix I, figure 11.
202 Interview 2.
History at Shanghai Normal University. Topics included historical preservation and conservation, museums, archives, social media, oral history, and urban public spaces, and sought to provide a foundation for teaching and understanding public history on the ground by professionals already working in these fields. Currently, Na Li is completing the first monograph written in Chinese on Chinese public history. In September 2017, Renmin University of China in Beijing will host its first International Workshop on Public History in China, devoted to a series of panels on professional practices, the dissemination of historical knowledge, oral histories, and cultural heritage and memory. Public history in China is developing at a breakneck pace, and as such, it is important to remember not just the ideals of public historical practice, but to take into account the multiple forces affecting the production and dissemination of public historical knowledge.

I hope that I have at least contributed to a richer and more complex picture of Chinese public history by focusing on a heartland province and its capital city and by taking into account the role of tourism in the production of public historical spaces and narratives. Existing scholarship on museums and historical sites in Beijing and Shanghai has been a valuable starting point for my work, and in a broader sense, it serves as a starting point for understanding Chinese public history as well. We know a good deal about Chinese public history in Beijing, so now it is time to devote significant research energy to other cities that are still widely visited but have little to no English-language scholarship concerning their museums or historical sites. The preceding three chapters are my attempt to help broaden our understanding of Chinese public history as it has developed over the past two decades and provide a few snapshots of historical sites and museums that otherwise fall silent in literature and research.

Understanding how museums and historical sites have come to be also contributes to the knowledge that professional historians may attain at those historical sites and in those museums. For ancient and premodern Chinese history, it is often useful and even necessary to fill in the gaps of the written historical record using artifacts, buildings, and other forms of material cultural heritage. A city such as Xi’an, with centuries of importance to various dynasties, contains a huge quantity of historical sites, museums, and museum objects, but knowing the manner in which those sites have been produced, altered, and reproduced is vital to ensuring that academic historical knowledge is not unduly influenced by contemporary practices of display or

---

203 Li and Sandweiss, “Teaching Public History.”
construction that are guided more by tourism income than by faith in the work of public history. These spaces of public history—museums and historical sites—belong to Xi’an and Shaanxi Province, they belong to China, and they belong to humanity. That we all remain aware of their present state and their transformations will do justice not only to these spaces themselves but to the past contained within them and the audiences who visit them to encounter that past firsthand.
Appendix I: Photographs and Visual Materials

Figure 1: Qianling Mausoleum Causeway and Gatehouse Watchtowers (ruined)

[Reproduced from Su Hong, ed. Xi’an: One of the Four Ancient Capitals in the World (Xi’an: Shaanxi Tourism Press, 2002), 42.]

Figure 2: Qianling Mausoleum Causeway and Gatehouse Watchtowers (rebuilt)

[Photo by author, taken June 2016]
Figure 3: Headless Statues and the Eastern Gatehouse Watchtower, Reverse Face (ruined)

[Reproduced from Su Hong, ed. Xi’an: One of the Four Ancient Capitals in the World (Xi’an: Shaanxi Tourism Press, 2002), 44.]

Figure 4: Wordless Stele and the Eastern Gatehouse Watchtower, Front Face (rebuilt)

[Photo by author, taken June 2016]
Figure 5: Hanguang Entranceway Remains and Museum

[Photo by author, taken June 2016]

Figure 6: Cyclists on the Xi’an City Wall

[Photo by author, taken June 2016]
Figure 7: “Objects” on Display at Terracotta Army Museum (including UNESCO recognition)
[Photo by author, taken June 2016]

Figure 8: Wall of Atrium/Entrance to Banpo Museum
[Photo by author, taken June 2016]
Figure 9: Art for Sale in the Tang West Market Museum Atrium

[Photo by author, taken June 2016]

Figure 10: *Shaanxi lishi bowuguan jiangjieci* (陕西历史博物馆讲解词), lit. “Shaanxi History Museum Guidebook.”

[Photo by author, taken June 2016.]
Figure 11: Kaiyuanmen Station mural depicting travelers on the Silk Road

[Photo by Bingwins on Wikimedia Commons, distributed under CC BY-SA 3.0 license]
Appendix II: Interviews and Site Visits

Interviews

All interviews conducted were arranged prior to the meeting date. I attempted to arrange additional interviews with historical site docents and historical site administrators via contacts in the municipal bureau of cultural heritage, but the sites they contacted on my behalf denied my request.


Interview 5: Travel director at Xi’an-based travel agency #2 (2010-present). Conducted June 8, 2016.


Interview 7: Member of Public Education Department at National Museum of China in Beijing (2011-present). Translation assistance by Dr. Pan Yihong. Conducted June 20, 2016.

Museums and Historical Sites

I conducted my research in Xi’an from June 3rd to June 17th, 2016, where I visited 16 historical sites and museums located in or near the city. I visited one to two sites per day in order to maximize my time at any given site for documenting materials and collecting information. Sites are listed in order of visit due to lack of standardized English nomenclature for some.


The Giant Wild Goose Pagoda is a Buddhist pagoda from the Tang Dynasty, located on the south side of Xi’an as part of Da Ci’en Temple. It was originally constructed by Emperor Gaozong to house relics and original and translated Buddhist texts collected by the monk Xuanzang. Entrance fee was ¥50, with an additional ¥30 fee to climb the pagoda.

西安城墙 [Xi’an City Wall]. Xi’an, Shaanxi, China. Visited June 6, 2016.
The Xi’an City Wall in its current form was reconstructed from the Ming Dynasty structure, and encircles the heart of Xi’an. It has a history stretching back to the Sui-Tang period, and today serves as the most in-tact city wall in China. The top of the wall functions as a path for tourists who can rent bicycles and cycle around the 13.7 kilometer circuit. Entrance fee was ¥54 and includes access to the Hanguang Entrance Remains Museum.

西安唐皇城墙含光门道遗址博物馆 [Xi’an Tang Imperial City Walls Hanguang Entrance Remains Museum]. Xi’an, Shaanxi, China. Visited June 6, 2016.

The Hanguang Entrance Remains Museum is an exhibition of history and artifacts of the City Wall with an archaeological focus on the Tang-era Hanguang Gate. It is part of the southern side of the City Wall and is directly beneath the wall itself, accessible from the top of the wall. The museum contains artifacts from earlier variations of the Wall as well as exposed cutaways of various periods in the Wall’s history. Entrance fee is included in the ¥54 City Wall ticket.

回民街 [Muslim Quarter]. Xi’an, Shaanxi, China. Visited June 6, 2016.

The Muslim Street or Muslim Quarter is located within the City Wall just north of the Drum Tower and is home to a large population of Hui minority people. It contains the Great Mosque of Xi’an and features hundreds of vendors and food shops owned or operated by Hui people. There is no fee to visit the street, and as such it is an incredibly popular tourist site in Xi’an.

陕西历史博物馆 [Shaanxi Provincial History Museum]. Xi’an, Shaanxi, China. Visited June 4 and 7, 2016.

Shaanxi Provincial Museum is located south of the City Wall in Xi’an and contains artifacts from all periods of history of Shaanxi Province. It encompasses prehistory, the Zhou, the Qin and specific exhibits on the Han, the Wei/Jin/Southern and Northern Dynasties, and the Sui-Tang. There is a single exhibit for history in Shaanxi after the Tang. There is a special exhibition of the Treasures of the Tang Dynasty, which displays some of China’s most valuable artifacts, all from a single archaeological find. Entrance was free, but tickets to the special exhibition are ¥20.

小雁塔 [Small Wild Goose Pagoda]. Xi’an, Shaanxi, China. Visited June 8, 2016.

The Small Wild Goose Pagoda is a Buddhist pagoda of Jianfu Temple from the Tang Dynasty located just south of the City Wall in the same complex as the Xi’an Museum. Entrance fee was ¥30 and included climbing the pagoda.

西安博物馆 [Xi’an Museum]. Xi’an, Shaanxi, China. Visited June 8, 2016.

Xi’an Museum is located in the same park as the Small Wild Goose Pagoda. It displays artifacts primarily from the city of Xi’an and contains historical exhibits of the city’s long history as the capital Chang’an. Entrance was free of charge with a photo ID.

The Beilin Museum, or Forest of Stone Steles, is located just inside the City Wall and houses hundreds of inscribed stone steles ranging from the Sui-Tang to the Qing Dynasties. The site also includes an exhibit hall of Sui-Tang Buddhist statuary. Entrance fee was ¥75.

西安钟楼 [Xi’an Bell Tower]. Xi’an, Shaanxi, China. Visited June 10, 2016.

The Bell Tower is located in the direct center of the city, at the heart of the avenues leading to all four main gates of the City Wall. It was built in the Ming Dynasty to provide notice of attacks on the city by rivals or invaders. Entrance fee was ¥35 or ¥50 for a ticket that includes the Drum Tower as well.

西安鼓楼 [Xi’an Drum Tower]. Xi’an, Shaanxi, China. Visited June 10, 2016.

The Drum Tower is located just across a park from the Bell Tower and served as a time-keeping structure from the Ming Dynasty onwards. It is located on the south end of the Muslim Quarter and hosts musical performances for tourists. Entrance fee was ¥35 or ¥50 for a ticket that includes the Bell Tower as well.


The Tang West Market is located on the western side of Xi’an and was designated during the Tang Dynasty as the main site of international trade from the Silk Road, in contrast to the East Market on the eastern side of the city, designated for domestic trade. The Tang West Market Museum is the first privately owned on-site museum in China. Entrance was free of charge.

半坡博物馆 [Xi’an Banpo Museum]. Xi’an, Shaanxi, China. Visited June 12, 2016.

The Banpo Site is an excavated Neolithic site located in the eastern half of modern day Xi’an, whose residents combined early forms of agriculture with hunting, fishing, and gathering for sustenance. The site museum includes a “Cultural Village,” which features demonstrations of how Banpo people crafted the objects on display in the museum itself. Entrance fee was ¥65.


Famen Temple is the purported site housing a relic of the Buddha’s finger bone and is located to the west of modern day Xi’an. While its original construction date is unknown, it was renamed Famen Temple in the Tang era. The original pagoda has been restored, and a new pagoda was built to house the finger bone relic. Entrance fee was ¥120.


Qianling is a funerary complex for Emperor Gaozong and Empress Wu Zetian of Tang, located in the hills to the northwest of Xi’an. Surrounding the site (and included in ticket price) are numerous satellite tombs: of Crown Prince Zhanghuai, Prince Yide, and Princess Yongtai. The satellite tombs have been excavated and opened for entry, but the main tomb remains unopened. Entrance fee was ¥122.

The Terracotta Army is part of the first emperor Qin Shi Huang’s funerary complex, located northeast of Xi’an proper. The Army is often considered China’s second most-famous historical site after the Great Wall, and is Xi’an’s most popular historical site and museum for both domestic and foreign tourists. Entrance fee was ¥150.


Huaqing Hot Springs Palace is located just northeast of Xi’an proper by mountainside. It served as an imperial retreat for over 3000 years, as well as the temporary prison of Chiang Kai-shek during the Xi’an Incident. It is an extremely popular historical site among Chinese and other East Asian tourists, but virtually unknown and unvisited by Western tourists. Entrance fee was ¥150.
Bibliography

Official Documents


Newspaper Articles


Online Materials


Other Published Materials

Bai Juyi. 长恨歌 [Song of Everlasting Sorrow].


Su Hong, ed. Xi’an: One of the Four Ancient Capitals of the World. Xi’an: Shaanxi Tourism Press, 2002.
Secondary Literature


“To Dig or Not to Dig: Qianling Mausoleum in the Spotlight Again.” *China Heritage Quarterly* no. 8 (December 2006): http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/articles.php?searchterm=008_qianling.inc&issue=008


